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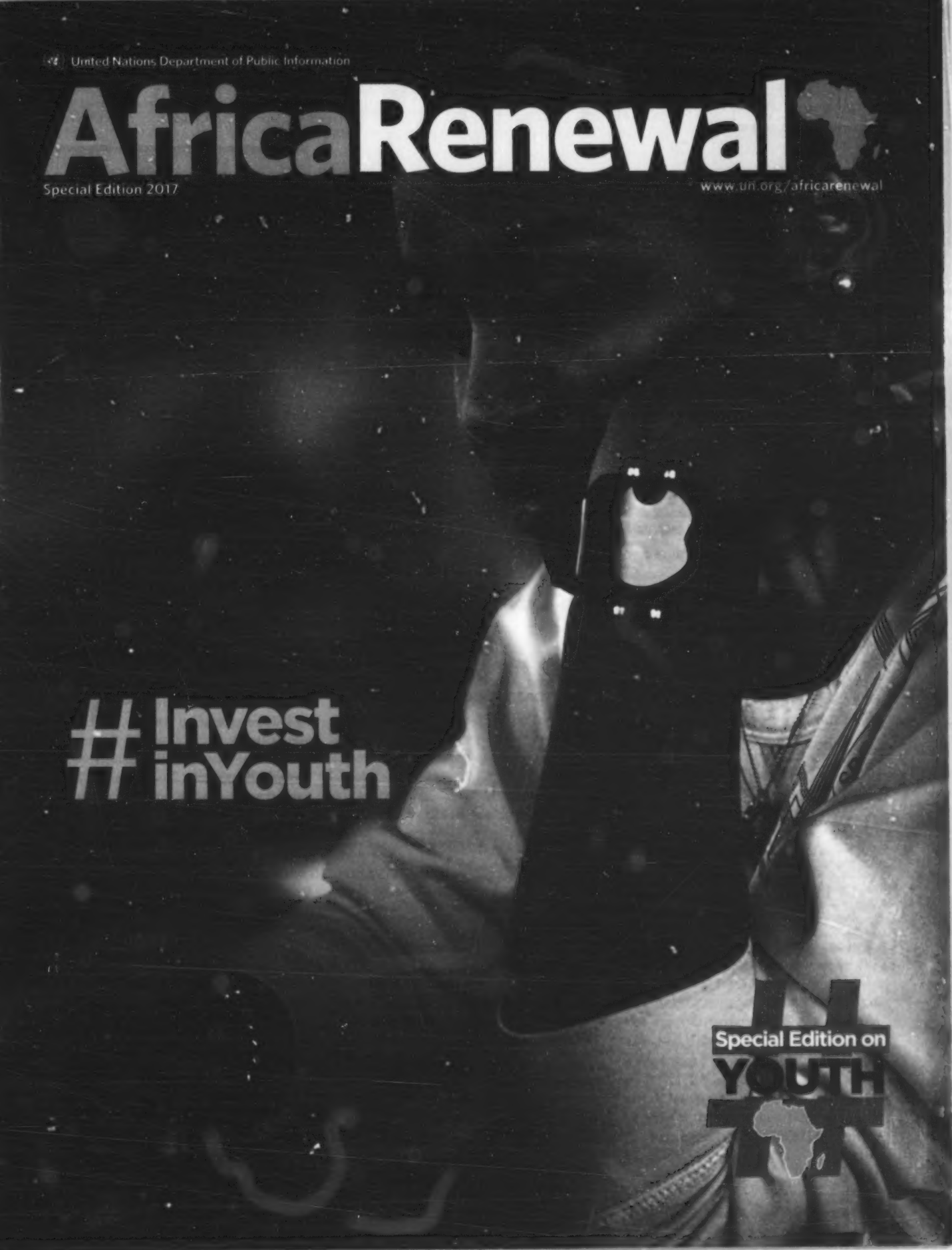

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Cover photo: ***A young woman at work at K-lab in Kigali, Rwanda.*** *Panos/Sven Torfinn*

Youths in Nairobi, Kenya. *Joseph Mathenge*

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As the African Union marks 2017 as the Year of Harnessing the Demographic Dividend Through Investments in Youth, this special edition looks at the many challenges and opportunities facing Africa's youth today in the fields of skills training, technology, entrepreneurship, agribusiness, advocacy and political activism, among others.

Special Edition on YOUTH

Participants at the United Nations Youth Forum held in New York in January this year. Africa Renewal/Ihuoma Atu...ga

Youth dividend or ticking time bomb?

"People talk about a demographic dividend for Africa. What we have now in Africa is not the 'dividend,' it is just a youth population bulge," Ahmad Alhendawi, the former United Nations youth envoy, told *Africa Renewal*. "A dividend is the result of your investments. If you invest well, you get results. But that doesn't happen by itself."

UN data leads us to look at Africa as the continent where countries have more people under 18 than on any other continent in the world. Further, the youth population in Africa is projected to double by 2050, which will place more and more stress on already strained resources for the region.

Depending on how governments respond to this reality, an exponentially expanding population of youth can turn into a ticking time bomb or a demographic dividend, defined by UN experts as the economic growth that ensues when there are more working-age people (15 to 64) than the non-working people (14 and younger, and 65 and older).

The alternative to a youth dividend is a youth bulge, which is characterized by high youth unemployment and widespread protests—a recipe for political instability. Frustrated by the lack of opportunities, many of Africa's young people are risking their lives on perilous journeys in search of a better life in Europe. Pools of idle youth are a magnet for recruiters from rebel or extremist groups.

A ticking time bomb can be defused when governments invest well and can reap demographic dividends. But how can they achieve the desired results? Experts from many corners of the world have proffered suggestions.

Governments should invest in projects that create jobs or enable youth to start their own businesses. They should also make agriculture more attractive to youth, promote technology, improve young people's skills and make school curricula relevant to the needs of job markets. Furthermore, they should pass and implement laws that end cultural practices which promote child marriages or keep girls away from school. Governments need to support gender equality, empower women and girls, crack down on teenage pregnancies and tackle communicable diseases.

Leaders frequently say they are keen to listen to young people, engage them when they design policies and make decisions on matters that affect them. The reality is that these decisions are often made with little or no input from youth. What the leaders end up with are policies that purport to improve the lives of young people when in fact they lack the perspective of what youth really want.

Young people want their leaders to listen to their worries, take them seriously and offer practical answers. It was therefore encouraging when Frederick Shava, the current president of UN Economic and the UN Social Council (ECOSOC), commended young people at the just-ended 2017 Youth Forum for "specific and frank assessments" of their concerns. He promised to strengthen their voices and participation "in building the future we want" in Africa.

Youth working on laptop computers at K Lab (Knowledge Lab), an open technology hub in Kigali, Rwanda. Panos/Sven Torfinn

YOUTH & ICT

Knowledge economy appeals to youth

New educational platforms transfer skills and spur innovation among young people

BY **JACOB KUSHNER**

Somewhere between the equator and the Kenyan town of Nanyuki, five students sit inside a classroom watching a YouTube video describe how to extract aluminum from bauxite. "Once you see it, it makes it so easy," exclaims 19-year-old Kenneth Karue.

Two years ago Gakawa Secondary School had no internet access. But thanks to an initiative by Mawingu Networks, a solar-powered internet service provider, rural Kenyan youth are going online for the first time, and with amazing results. High school students like Karue, who didn't know how to use a keyboard, much less a search engine, are now Googling entry requirements for information technology programmes at Nairobi universities.

Some of these students aspire to careers in Africa's blossoming information and communications technology (ICT) sector. The World Bank estimated that in 2016, African nations would invest between $155 billion and $180 billion in the ICT sector, accounting for 6%–7% of Africa's gross domestic product (GDP). But young people say there are major barriers preventing them from finding jobs in the industry.

"We have a lot of young people. But unfortunately they come from neighbourhoods that don't have a lot of opportunities," says Tim Nderi, the chief executive officer of Mawingu Networks.

Since 2013 Microsoft has invested in Mawingu Networks on the premise that enabling young Africans to access the digital world is the first step towards getting them employed in it.

However, "Do people have access to the internet, and is that access affordable?" asked Microsoft's Anthony Cook in an interview with *Africa Renewal*. "As you think about moving towards a knowledge economy, you have to be able to take the bulk of the population with you."

By October 2016, ten thousand people were using Mawingu's internet in four different Kenyan counties. And in September, former President Barack Obama lauded Microsoft and Mawingu's success

during his address at the US-Africa Business Forum in Cape Town.

Many African countries have embraced the idea of a *knowledge economy*, a term coined in the 1960s to describe economies in which the production and use of knowledge are paramount. Academic institutions and companies engaging in research and development are important foundations of such a system. And so are those who apply this knowledge—the programmers developing new software and search engines to use data, and the health workers who use data to improve treatments.

A long way to go

Some African governments have begun employing tech-ready youth in the public sector. In Kenya, where an estimated 5 million youth are unemployed, the Presidential Digital Talent Programme recruited 400 university graduates to work on major projects at different ministries. A $150 million, five-year public-private partnership launched last year by the World Bank set out to help 280,000 unemployed Kenyan youth learn about employment opportunities and undergo employability training.

But elsewhere on the continent, such government initiatives have fallen short. Three years after it began, Innovate Lagos, a 2013 Nigerian government-funded ICT incubator that set out to prepare youth and other entrepreneurs to "drive growth and development through innovation," no longer even owns the domain name of its website.

Africans have good reason to be hesitant about the idea of their countries' economies being centered on information technology. "Many of the new jobs that have been created over the past two decades are fundamentally different from the ones that have been lost, and the new jobs tend to favour educated workers over those with less education and skills," says author Dan Tapscott in the 2014 edition of *The Digital Economy*, his book about the global ICT industry.

For those preparing for careers in ICT, access to the internet and to education are fundamental prerequisites. Fortunately, in places like Nigeria, cellular internet is becoming eminently affordable.

"Recently, data prices in Nigeria crashed by more than 50%. For just a dollar and a

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Training Africa's young techies

BY JACOB KUSHNER

As Africa's ICT sector grows, many young Africans are hard at work, brushing up their skills for tomorrow's jobs. In Nairobi, a privately owned coding school called Moringa School has become a popular place in which to find them.

Moringa's core four-month programme trains tech-savvy young Kenyans to become proficient in different coding languages and offers extension courses in up-and-coming fields like mobile development. At just $1,200, it's far less expensive than a university degree. That may be part of the reason demand for Moringa is off the charts: the school has been operating for just over two years, and yet one recent application pool received 400 applications for just 27 openings.

Those who are lucky enough to get in are among Nairobi's most qualified young coders. Some have degrees in computer science from top Kenyan universities. Others put off formal study or have dropped out of university altogether.

Before he enrolled, 24-year-old Ian Munene was attending one of Kenya's top universities for technology studies. But he said his professors were too concentrated on the *theory* behind innovation to adequately teach him how to innovate in practice.

When he graduated, Munene says he "tried to find a job, but from what feedback I got, I wasn't ready." He was told he wasn't qualified to fill the ICT positions that existed. "There's a gap between university education and what employers actually need," says Munene. "Moringa bridges that gap."

Many of Moringa's graduates go on to work for major East African and international companies. Tonee Ndungu, who hired two of Moringa's early graduates to work for his digital textbooks start-up, Kytabu, said he recruited coders from as far as India and Kazakhstan before finally finding qualified Kenyan coders at Moringa. "There's just nowhere for them to go to learn," Ndungu told *Africa Renewal*.

Moringa is just one of many initiatives that are preparing young Africans for jobs in ICT. The New York–based company Andela offers Nigerians a four-month programming course over the Internet and then puts them to work coding for US organizations or companies. And last year a public-private partnership called Africa Code Week helped 89,000 young people in 17 African countries write their very first lines of code.

"You have so many developers. But where are the good ones?" asks Moringa co-founder Frank Tamre, 28, who left his job as a programming consultant at Intel to launch Moringa.

"It's the same thing when you go to Uganda or Tanzania," says Tamre, speaking of Africa's urban, educated youth. "Most of them, they want to be creators." But with practical educational opportunities like Moringa at their disposal, he hopes they'll be able to put their creative ambitions to use.

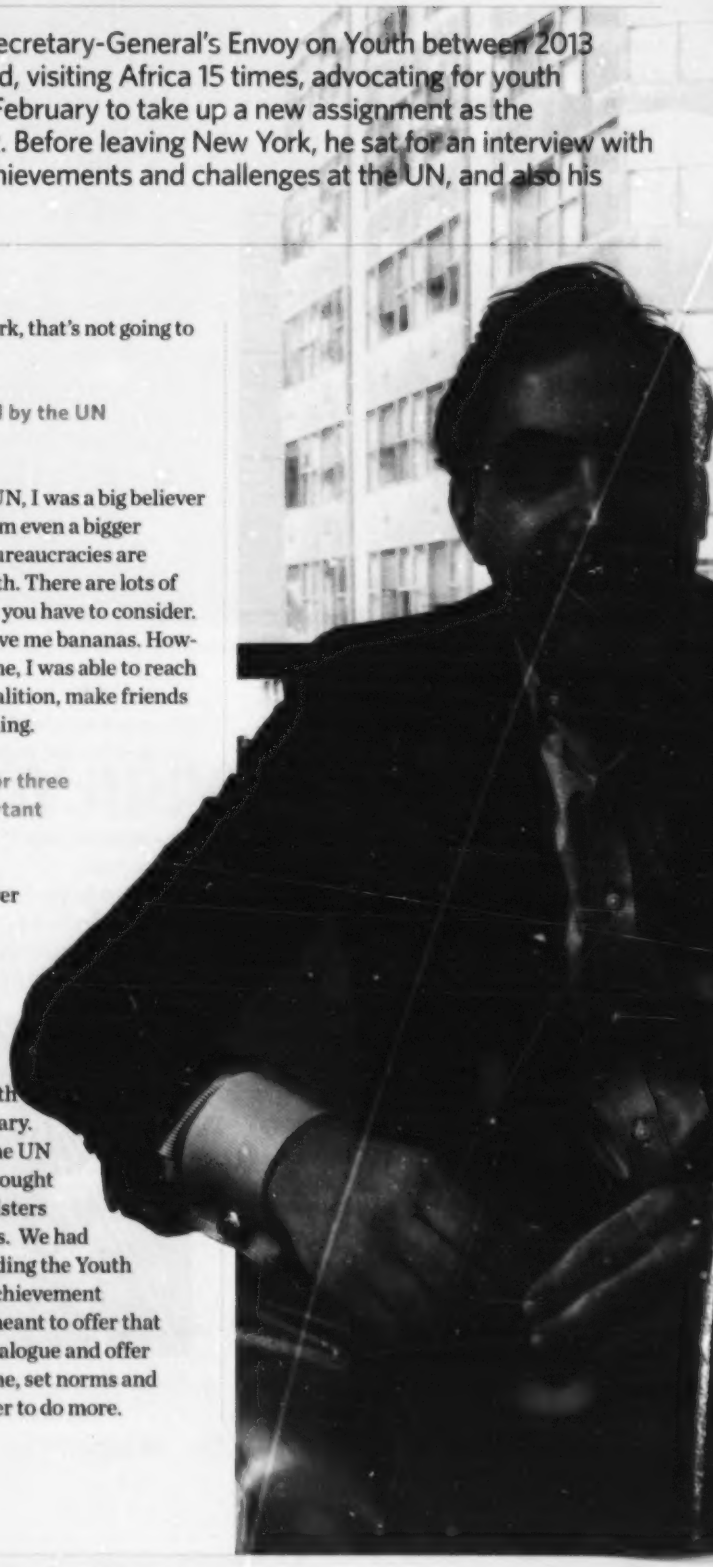
Students in the University of Nigeria's internet room. Panos/Leo Erken

Q&A

Africa's future rests on its youth

— Ahmad Alhendawi, former United Nations youth envoy

Ahmad Alhendawi served as the United Nations Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth between 2013 and 2017. During that period, he traversed the world, visiting Africa 15 times, advocating for youth empowerment. Mr. Alhendawi left his UN job last February to take up a new assignment as the Secretary-General of the World's Scout Movement. Before leaving New York, he sat for an interview with *Africa Renewal*'s **Kingsley Ighobor** to discuss his achievements and challenges at the UN, and also his deeply-felt hopes for Africa's youth.



Africa Renewal: After four years as the UN youth envoy, how would you summarize your experience?

Mr. Alhendawi: It's been a very unique experience. I joined the UN at the age of 27 as a senior advisor to the Secretary-General. The UN was already working on youth issues, but my appointment signaled that youth matters were being elevated at the UN secretariat. Whenever young entrepreneurs asked me what my job was, I told them that 'I'm running a start-up'. It felt like a startup, because I started in a small cubicle: no staff, no budget and no mandate and we had to start from scratch. Luckily, the office has enjoyed a lot of support. We have seen the youth agenda gaining momentum and recognition. There has also been the incredibly rich experience of traveling around the world and meeting young people and engaging with Member States.

Were you initially overwhelmed?

I was totally overwhelmed when I first arrived. I knew it was going to be a daunting task, but I didn't fully appreciate the complexity. You do more when you are not intimidated by structure.

What do you mean by being 'intimidated by structure'?

I mean that a lot of talented people that work in big organizations are defeated by structures, defeated by bureaucracy; the fact that a bunch of people are telling you: 'No, this doesn't work, that's not going to work.'

Were you defeated by the UN structure?

When I joined the UN, I was a big believer in the institution; I'm even a bigger believer now. But bureaucracies are not easy to work with. There are lots of complex issues that you have to consider. Sometimes this drove me bananas. However, most of the time, I was able to reach out, build a good coalition, make friends and achieve something.

What are the two or three of your most important achievements?

I would say that never before have youth issues been recognized as much as they are now, judging by the ECOSOC [UN Economic and Social Council] Youth Forum held in January. For the first time, the UN held a forum that brought together youth ministers from Member States. We had 129 ministers attending the Youth Forum. This is an achievement because the UN is meant to offer that space to facilitate dialogue and offer a platform to convene, set norms and encourage each other to do more.

Another achievement is that in the Sustainable Development Goals, there are up to 60 indicators (out of the total 230) that pertain to youth development. This is because the process leading to the SDGs had huge input from young people. We didn't have that for the Millennium Development Goals.

We also have the Security Council Resolution 2250 on youth, peace and security. The Human Rights Council adopted for the first time in its history a resolution on youth and human rights. In Addis Ababa [Ethiopia], the first outcome for the Financing for Development Conference focuses on youth policies and youth development. The Peacebuilding Commission for the first time set up a peacebuilding fund on youth and peace building. And the list goes on. I mean, every aspect of operations at the UN is now paying attention to youth issues.

What impact do these resolutions or frameworks have on youth in local communities?

At the end of the day, you can't solve a problem without talking about it. But you also can't solve it by just talking about it. My job was to make sure these issues are talked about in a meaningful way. Now, if you ask me if the situation for youth improved in the countries, I don't think there is a huge improvement yet, and that's why we still need to do more.

About 60% of Africa's unemployed are young people. What are the consequences of such a high youth unemployment figure?

It wastes the potential of Africa and its youth. If countries fail their youth, they end up becoming failed states. Africa has the largest percentage of young people. People talk about a demographic dividend for Africa. What we have now in Africa is not the 'dividend' it is just a youth population bulge.

Why not a dividend?

The dividend is the result of your investments. If you invest well, you get results—you get a peace dividend and a development dividend. But that doesn't happen by itself.

You mean the lack of investments in the youth will put at risk the prospects for peace or development ?

Yes. Historically, there is a correlation between a rise in the numbers of young people and transitions. The Asian tigers: when they had too many young people, they had an economic transition. Eastern Europe and the Arab Spring: they had political transitions. I think it's up to Africa and its leaders to decide what will be the transition.

Within the youth advocacy world, is there a growing focus on prospects for women and girls in development?

Absolutely! In North Africa, for example, the unemployment rate among young women and girls is double that of young men. In Uganda, you have a high teenage pregnancy rate. The point is simple; you cannot have many young women and girls holding jobs and pursuing careers if they are being victims of early marriage, teenage pregnancy or high maternal mortality. Ensuring that girls are in school and can enjoy their childhood is crucial for development. I think it is almost a game-over for a young girl who is married or pregnant at 13. It means she will drop out of school and could get caught up in a vicious circle of poverty and illiteracy.

Some African societies tolerate child marriage and teenage pregnancy. How can we break through such cultural barriers?

We need local, religious and community leaders, and politicians to speak the truth—that allowing girls to finish their schooling and make informed choices for their lives is essential.

Many African countries have strategies for the development of their young people, but these strategies don't necessarily translate into better lives for young people. What is missing?

There's no one profile for a failed youth policy, but there are commonalities that include, basically, a lack of serious political will, a lack of funding, and no real engagement with young people. We also have weak structures: the legal frameworks, the taxation, the access to credit, among others.

Can innovation and technology be a game changer for young people?

Sure. There's massive potential in information technology. But you need more skilled labour, you need more qualified young people, and you need to invest more in the youth. We are seeing some of the amazing start-ups coming from Africa, more faces that are shaping the way we work.

How does your new role with the Scout Movement align with what you did here at the UN?

I will be heading an organization of 40 million members. Actually, I went to meet the Secretary-General to inform him that I would be taking this [Scout Movement] job. He told me that this is a very good deal for the United Nations. He said 'We lose one, we gain 40 million.' I thought that was true. We have to get down to business; we can't just keep on talking about the SDGs.

How do you see the future of young people in Africa in particular?

I have no doubt it is going to be bright, because the energy I've seen there, the talents I saw in Africa, are unparalleled.

Ahmad Alhendawi. *Africa Renewal/Franck Kuwonu*

Youth discontented with politics yet less likely to vie or even vote

BY **FRANCK KUWONU**

Workers in Durban, South Africa, protesting over youth unemployment. *Reuters/Rogan Ward*

When law enforcement officers rounded up a group of political demonstrators in The Gambia's capital, Banjul, in December 2016, most of those arrested were young people. They were protesting against The Gambia's then-president Yahya Jammeh's decision to stay in office after having initially conceded defeat to his electoral opponent, Adama Barrow. Under sustained local and international pressure, he finally relinquished power and went into exile.

The Gambian protests were just one of a series that have gripped many countries across the continent over the last 10 years. In 2015 and 2016 alone, about half of the continent experienced major protests, *Africanews*, a pan-African news broadcaster, reported.

Before The Gambia, Ethiopia's Oromia and Amhara Regions garnered attention as scores of people protested almost daily, first over land ownership issues and soon over political exclusion. In South Africa, proposed hikes of tuition fees unleashed students on the streets to demand deep reforms in university education.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), uncertainties about the end of President Joseph Kabila's constitutional mandate provoked protests and riots in the capital, Kinshasa, and across the country for the better part of the year.

In Zimbabwe, a social media campaign in 2016 against the prolonged stay in office of President Robert Mugabe drove protesters into the streets, the latest in a string of demonstrations against his government over the past decade.

Media reports on street demonstrations routinely highlight the active presence of youth at the helm of these political and social discontents across the continent. Spreading from Tunisia, the Arab Spring was inspired by youth protests. In Egypt, young activists were instrumental in ushering in political change that seems to have been gradually reversed, while in West Africa, Senegalese activists from *Y'en a Marre* (Fed Up) and Burkina Faso's *Le Balai*

Citoyen (Citizen Broom) were successful in mobilizing against constitutional changes in their respective countries.

In other countries, such as Burundi, Central African Republic and Gabon, young people were active in voicing their discontent over a variety of issues, including free and fair elections.

Yet despite the increasing role of youth in political protests, studies suggest that political participation, which involves more than protesting, lags among those aged 18-35.

"African youth are less likely to vote in national elections, engage in civic activities or join others in raising an issue, compared to their elders," Michael Bratton, professor of political science and African studies at Michigan State University in the United States, told *Africa Renewal*.

Professor Bratton referred to a survey published in August 2016 by Ghana-based Afrobarometer, an independent pan-African research network that conducts public opinion surveys, of which he is a co-founder. Conducted in 36 countries across the continent, the survey found that only 65% of young people eligible to vote cast a vote in their country's last national election, compared to almost 80% of older people.

Suspicions and hurdles

So why is it that, despite being more active than their elders in political protests, young people are often less engaged in the overall political processes across the continent?

"The situation is not unique to Africa," says Professor Bratton. "The trend is global."

Among the key reasons is the overall reluctance by young activists on the continent to associate themselves with partisan politics, as there is a lack of trust of young people in their current elected representatives. There is often a perception among youth in some countries that politicians are generally corrupt and whoever associates with them is bound to be corrupted.

Boniface Mwangi, a firebrand and popular Kenyan young political activist, raised eyebrows in his country when he announced in 2016 that he would stand for a parliamentary seat in 2017. At his book signing event, held in New York in January, a bewildered young woman confronted Mr. Mwangi. "What makes you think you won't become just like them?" she asked. Another Kenyan demanded to know from Mr. Mwangi: "You have denounced them as corrupt, and now you want to join them? What makes you think you won't become just like them?" The young politician's response that he is "principled and will not change" did not seem to convince most of the young Kenyans at the event.

When young people protest on the streets, they usually do so under the banners of civic and nonpartisan groups. "We are not politicians, we are citizens and we don't want to be beholden to political parties," Idrissa Barry of *Le Balai Citoyen* told *Africa Renewal*. They say they want to stay nonpartisan beyond the protests in order to continue to hold politicians accountable.

Yet by refusing to hold political office, young people appear to be denying themselves opportunities to participate in policy making and changing the laws. Other problems they face when they want to run for election include disparities between voting and eligibility ages. In most countries "there is a gap between the legal...voting age and the age at which an individual can serve in elective office," noted a 2013 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) guide on enhancing youth participation throughout the electoral cycle. While the average voting age across the continent is 18.2 years, the age for vying is 22.1 years.

> **"There is an overall reluctance by young activists on the continent to associate themselves with partisan politics.**

"An African skills revolution is needed to unlock the potential, the energy, the creativity and the talents of Africa's young men and women," said Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, the former chairperson of the Africa Union (AU) Commission, early this year.

As African leaders converged in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, last January to discuss how to ensure the continent fully benefits from the opportunities offered by its young population, and how to tackle unemployment, Ms. Dlamini-Zuma said engaging youth, creating jobs, transforming economies, including through diversification, modernising and industrializing agriculture and investing in young people were the ways forward.

AU youth charter

The AU acknowledged the importance of investing in young people by adopting the African Youth Charter about 10 years ago and later declaring 2009 through 2018 the "African Youth Decade." It developed an action plan to empower youth and promote their participation in politics. Yet, as events in many African cities and various surveys, have shown, plans to get more youth elected to political office have not been translated into action.

Less than two years before the end of the youth decade in 2018, there is not much evidence that governments have conceived, let alone implemented, youth-targeted programmes to encourage their participation in the political processes, except in a few countries.

Some countries have resorted to affirmative action to ensure youth are represented in parliament. According to the UNDP, Uganda reserves five seats in its parliament for youth representatives. In Kenya, 12 parliamentary seats are reserved for representatives to be nominated by political parties to represent special interests, including youth, people with disabilities and workers. In Rwanda, the National Youth Council elects two members to the chamber of deputies. In Morocco, the election law includes 30 seats reserved for candidates under the age of 40.

Most youth initiatives on the continent, however, appear to be more about providing jobs and decent education than participation in the political system, including representation.

During the run-up to the presidential election in Tanzania in October 2015, observers noted that the country's youth could tip the poll to the opposition coalition, thus ending the decades-long presence of the incumbent party at the helm of the East African country since independence. They cited the use of social media platforms as a campaign tool, the involvement of scores of young people as election monitors and the high attendance of youth at opposition rallies.

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Entrepreneurial universities: Marrying scholarly research with business acumen

New trend releases the power of entrepreneurship

BY **ZIPPORAH MUSAU**

What would you think of a university that provides you with world-class education, pays for your internship abroad and, when you graduate, gives you a cool $100,000 to start your own business?

Welcome to the world of entrepreneurial universities, a new trend among institutions of higher learning worldwide of going beyond their traditional role of providing education to incorporate research, innovation, commercialization of knowledge and entrepreneurship.

There is no one-size-fits-all definition of the entrepreneurial university, but rather a plurality of approaches, inventive, creative and yet practical, that distinguishes the entrepreneurial style.

Tired of churning out thousands of graduates each year who cannot find jobs, universities are gravitating towards innovation and entrepreneurship. These universities go by different names: some call them entrepreneurial universities, others innovation universities, and others refer to the business "incubators" that take students through the rigours of running a business. The common thread is the emphasis on innovation and entrepreneurship.

Ronnie Washington, a 28-year-old American graduate, understands well the benefits of attending entrepreneurial universities. In 2014 he joined Stanford University's Graduate School of Business for a two-year master of business administration (MBA) degree. Near the end of his course, he travelled to Ghana for a five-week internship, sponsored by the Stanford Institute for Innovation in Developing Economies, otherwise known as Seed. It paid for his ticket and accommodation.

While in Ghana, Mr. Washington worked under Michael Amankwa, the founder and chief executive officer of CoreNett, a tech company that creates electronic payment processing programmes for financial institutions, retailers and governments. Here he learned the ropes of running a business. No challenge he faced during his time in Ghana, from infrastructure problems to power outages, could stop the young graduate from seeing the bigger picture—what it takes to be an entrepreneur.

On his return to the United States, Mr. Washington created Onward, a computer application that makes it easier for low-income workers to save and also to borrow money from a revolving credit line for small family emergencies. In late 2016 he was named the Stanford Social Innovation Fellow and was given a $110,000 grant to start his own business. Mr. Washington is now the CEO of Onward, based in Washington, DC.

In traditional universities a student attends lectures, writes exams and submits a thesis before graduating. But at entrepreneurial universities, students are trained to go a step further and turn their research papers into business ventures. Some universities also liaise with industries interested in using their type of research.

In their book *Engines of Innovation: The Entrepreneurial University in the 21st Century*, American authors Holden Thorp and Buck Goldstein say universities should use their vast "intellectual and financial resources to confront global challenges such as climate change, extreme poverty, childhood diseases, and an impending worldwide shortage of clean water."

> **"Intellectual and financial resources can confront global challenges such as climate change, extreme poverty, childhood diseases, and an impending worldwide water shortage.**

Hastened by globalization and increased competition, the industrial mode of production has run out of steam in many countries. And so has the traditional scheme for post-secondary education, with its emphasis on theory over practice. Far more emphasis is needed in practical

Young entrepreneurs from Egypt, Rwanda and Peru discuss their experiences with US former President Barack Obama and Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg at an entrepreneurship summit at Stanford University last year.

Stanford University/Aaron Kehoe

experience, academics are starting to say, in a real working environment.

This entrepreneurial phenomenon is not limited to business schools, but also occurs in universities specializing in such fields as agriculture, science, medicine and information technology.

Some of the many US universities that have been quick to embrace the innovation and entrepreneurship model include Stanford University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Harvard University, the University of California and the University of Wisconsin. Stanford University in 2015 opened two centres in Africa (in Ghana and Kenya) to offer internship programmes to young entrepreneurs.

Brazil, China, Europe and North and Latin America, as well as some newly industrialized or industrializing countries, have embraced it.

Calestous Juma, professor of practice of international development at Harvard Kennedy School, says African universities should embrace innovations to be able to "respond to local needs."

In February 2016, African leaders invited Professor Juma to the African Union (AU) summit in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to present a paper on how universities can integrate education, research and innovation.

One of the objectives of AU's Agenda 2063, Africa's development blueprint for the next 50 years, is to reposition the continent as a strategic player in the global economy through improved education and the application of science and technology in development. Achieving these objectives will require aligning education, research and innovation with long-term socioeconomic objectives.

So far only a couple of universities in Africa have embraced innovation and entrepreneurship. Professor Juma gives an example of Stellenbosch University in South Africa, which built and launched a satellite as one of its innovations.

Kenya's Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, Professor Juma says, "pioneered in commercializing tissue culture bananas, hence bringing together teaching, research and product commercialization." Tissue culture is a method whereby plants are produced from roots, leaves or stems in a lab in great numbers to increase yields. The university also recently created the Nairobi Industrial and Technology Park in a public-private partnership with the Kenya's Ministry of Industrialization and Enterprise Development to facilitate uptake of university research results by industry players. It will also provide a shopping mall space to incubated firms started by the students.

In West Africa, the University of Ghana is implementing the same innovation and entrepreneurship model. While acknowledging the need to "[change] the orientation of universities in Africa to be able to put research and knowledge into actual use," the university's Professor James Dzisah told *Africa Renewal* that some of the challenges of implementing this model include the high costs of reorienting students and integrating the new thinking into traditional universities.

"Whatever the cost, it is time Africa invested in these universities," says Professor Dzisah.

These universities benefit not just the students but themselves. "Creating such universities will have two important budgetary implications. First, it will broaden the base for funding innovation by enabling specialized actors and industry to design and operate new universities using their own budgets," Professor Juma told AU leaders. "Second, this will reduce the need to rely on funding from ministries of education."

Thandwa Mthembu, the vice-chancellor and principal of the Durban Institute of Technology in South Africa, told the *University World News* of his plans for embedding entrepreneurship into the curricula and internal systems of universities.

After touring 10 institutions in seven countries that have successful entrepreneurship education programmes, including Finland, Germany, Mexico and Spain, Professor Mthembu liked the idea of embedding entrepreneurship education into the curriculum from the first year of study, and the idea of emphasizing practical skills, real-life challenges and group work. He believes these things can make students

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Why online courses are trending

BY **ELENI MOURDOUKOTUAS**

Hundreds of university students in Nigeria, Sierra Leone, South Africa and other African countries took to the streets last year to protest against high tuition fees, lack of equal access to education and inferior learning environments at their learning institutions. The clashes, which disrupted the universities' academic calendars, highlighted the harsh conditions students face on the continent.

To put it into perspective, only about 6% of young people in sub-Saharan Africa are enrolled in higher education institutions, according to a 2015 report by the Africa-America Institute (AAI), a US-based organization that seeks to foster relations between Africa and the United States through higher education.

The introduction of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) may, however, provide a lifeline for African students who desire to circumvent college entry difficulties. MOOCs are freely accessible online courses on various subjects that can be taken by anyone from anywhere in the world. One of the advantages of these courses is that they are accessible to unlimited number of students.

"They are very valuable if you consider that MOOCs means access to some of the best experts in the world about a certain topic, and access to knowledge that one cannot otherwise find easily," Carmine Paolo De Salvo told *Africa Renewal*.

Mr. De Salvo is an instructor for a 2016 MOOCs focusing on agricultural policies produced by the Inter-American Development Bank on edX, an online learning platform.

Online education or e-learning is not new to Africa and many institutions, including the African Virtual University, have made university education from accredited schools available online since the late 90s. Countries such as Mauritius, Nigeria, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe have embraced the e-learning movement using various online instruction methods.

While traditional e-learning makes tertiary education more accessible, it can still be limiting due to high fees, and because courses are only open at specific times of the year. As a result, students who intend to pursue specialized and flexible postgraduate education are now turning to open online courses.

Experts say that MOOCs can complement traditional education. But because access to higher education in sub-Saharan Africa is lower than the global average by at least 20%, according to the Africa-America Institute, open online courses could actually be the only means for those who lack other opportunities for advancing their education.

In addition to edX, MOOCs are available through providers such as Coursera and Udacity, both of which are also employed by prominent US universities such as Princeton, Stanford and Harvard. Institutions using MOOCs present learning materials through a variety of methods, including

Entrepreneurial universities ...

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ready to start viable businesses by the time they graduate.

"We need to shift the emphasis from theory to practice from day one, asking ourselves: 'How can we add value to society rather than to our brains only?'" says Professor Mthembu.

While traditional universities have climbed onto the entrepreneurship bandwagon, such programmes often focus on postgraduate MBAs that produce "intrapreneurs"—people who drive innovations within their current companies—rather than "entrepreneurs" who come from outside the system to create something new, he said.

"We need to get beyond the point of simply identifying a few students with good ideas and working with them, to the point at which every student is taken through a well-designed methodology in a fully-fledged programme."

At Harvard University, economic and social entrepreneurship in Africa is one of the most robust and fastest-growing areas of interest. In the 2014–15 academic year, the Center for African Studies consolidated multiple initiatives along with some new ones into its African Entrepreneurship Program.

This programme creates and facilitates a range of activities at Harvard and in Africa, incubating innovative ideas, introducing entrepreneurship into classrooms and study-abroad programmes, offering

articles, videos, discussion threads and infographics and they typically last between five and twelve weeks. While most courses are not available for credit, individuals who are successful in a course can receive a free certificate or pay a relatively small fee, usually about $25, to get the certificate after completion.

African universities have recently begun to embrace MOOCs, following in the footsteps of prominent American and European universities. In 2016, the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa, became the first African university to offer MOOCs on the edX platform. A year earlier, the University of Cape Town, also in South Africa, was the first in Africa to offer MOOCs through the Coursera platform. More universities in other countries are expected to join the bandwagon in the coming years.

Although Africa still has grounds to make up, a 2016 study by the Technology and Social Change Group (TASCHA) at the University of Washington Information School, a US-based network of tech researchers, found that the highest completion rates for MOOCs are in developing countries. According to the study, low- and middle-income populations make up 80% of MOOCs' users, and 82% of South African participants are 30 years or younger.

A 2015 survey by Coursera, a prominent MOOCs platform, found that as a result of taking online courses, an overwhelming 87% of participants reported career benefits, with 33% mentioning tangible career benefits.

"Usually, the feedback we receive is very positive. Some people told us that their lives had changed, thanks to MOOCs," said Mr. De Salvo.

A group of students at North-West University in Gaborone, Botswana. *Panos/ Marc Shoul*

direct mentorship and internship opportunities for undergraduate and professional school students, and cultivating collaborative opportunities for the production and execution of game-changing ideas.

The origin

Professor Henry Etzkowitz of State University of New York's Purchase College, the man credited with coining the term *entrepreneurial universities* in the 1980s, told *Africa Renewal* that he first noticed at the time that some universities in the United States, such as MIT, were gravitating towards the entrepreneurial model. He decided to do further research on this model while at MIT.

"These universities aim to put their knowledge to teaching students, conducting research and taking a more active role in society with different actors and companies," said Professor Etzkowitz.

Terming it a second academic revolution, Professor Etzkowitz notes that entrepreneurial universities are transforming the traditional teaching and research university by encouraging interaction among university, industry, government, which is the key to improving the conditions for innovation in a knowledge-based society.

Of the major changes that have occurred in the scientific world, a scholar at the Royal Society of London observed: "Many top academics are now also top entrepreneurs, forming their own companies, collaborating with big business, exploiting their inventions and contributing to the wealth of the nation."

Africa's jobless youth cast a shadow over economic growth

Leaders put job-creation programmes on the front burner

BY **KINGSLEY IGHOBOR**

African governments are confronting unemployment in many different ways. In Senegal, with 200,000 Senegalese joining the labour market each year, President Macky Sall launched a programme in February 2013 to create 30,000 jobs within a year and possibly 300,000 by 2017. The African Development Bank (AfDB) is financing some of Senegal's self-employment programmes for youth and women.

Youths account for 60% of all of Africa's jobless, according to the World Bank. In North Africa, the youth unemployment rate is 25% but is even greater in Botswana, the Republic of the Congo, Senegal, and South Africa, among others. With 200 million people aged between 15 and 24, Africa has the largest population of young people in the world.

In most African countries, youth unemployment "occurs at a rate more than twice that for adults," notes the African Development Bank.

Young women feel the sting of unemployment even more sharply than young men. The AfDB found that in most countries in sub-Saharan Africa and all of those in North Africa, it is easier for men to get jobs than it is for women, even if they have equivalent skills and experience.

Africa's unemployment statistics exclude those in vulnerable employment and those who are under-employed in informal sectors. "Young people [in Africa] find work, but not in places that pay good wages, develop skills or provide a measure of job security," reports the Brookings Institution, a Washington-based think tank.

The Brookings Institution considers under-employment a problem serious enough to warrant greater attention, since it masks the reality in countries that post low unemployment rates.

More than 70% of the youth in the "Republic of the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi, Mali, Rwanda, Senegal and Uganda are either self-employed or contributing to family work," adds the Brookings Institution report.

Under-employment masked

Gabriel Benjamin, a jobless university graduate in Lagos, Nigeria, says it is common to find young Nigerian university graduates doing menial jobs. "They clean floors in hotels, sell mobile telephone calling cards—some even work in factories as labourers."

But under-employment is not a solution to poverty, notes the International Labour Organization (ILO), which reported in 2016 that up to 70% of African workers were "working poor," the highest rate globally. The organization added that "the number of poor working youth has increased by as much as 80% for the past 25 years."

Mthuli Ncube, the chief economist at the AfDB, had this to say: "This is an unacceptable reality on a continent with such an impressive pool of youth, talent and creativity."

Alexander Chikwanda, Zambia's former finance minister, put it succinctly an interview: "Youth unemployment is a ticking time bomb," that now appears to be perilously close to exploding. The analogy draws attention to the consequences of high youth unemployment in a continent where about 10-12 million young people join the labour market each year.

"As events in North Africa [the Arab Spring] have shown, lack of employment opportunities can undermine social cohesion and political stability," the AfDB had warned in 2016.

The militant group Boko Haram, for example, has found it easy to recruit jobless

A worker at Sea Harvest Fisheries Saldanha Bay in Western Cape, South Africa. *Africa Media Online/Pippa Hetherington*

Young workers in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, packing beans for export. *Panos/Sven Torfinn*

young people, noted Ahmad Salkida, a Nigerian journalist who has had rare access to the group.

A number of African governments have, however, made some efforts to match words with action. Ghana, for example, created a national youth service and empowerment programmes to equip college graduates with requisite skills and help them find jobs. Mauritius developed a plan to encourage technical and vocational education for young people. Zambia introduced a national youth policy and a youth enterprise fund to stimulate job creation.

African leaders intervene

The jury is still out as to how much of an impact such national initiatives have had on youth unemployment. Mr. Ncube warned against high expectations. There are "no quick fixes," he advised, and recommended "stronger job-creation mechanisms." The World Bank proposes a jobs strategy that pays more attention to rural development. Investment in agriculture slows down youth migration into urban areas and prepares young people for the contemporary labour market.

Young people migrating into Africa's urban areas aggravate city unemployment. They often confront obstacles, including discrimination due to their inexperience, according to *African Economic Outlook*, a publication of the UN Economic Commission for Africa. Even those who are lucky enough to find employment are the first to be laid off when economic growth derails.

Focus on manufacturing, urges the Brookings Institution, because it is "the industrial sector which is most closely associated with employment-intensive growth." It also urges more investment in agriculture, tourism and construction, and in projects that employ young people. "Public works programmes provide opportunities for young workers, particularly rural residents and people with low skills, to acquire initial work experience."

The African Union also lends its voice to the call for more investments in agriculture. The AU requests its members to allocate 15% of their national budgets to agriculture.

Ghanaian opposition politicians used the country's high unemployment rate to mobilize the youth against former president John Dramani Mahama in the country's December 2016 presidential election. Joblessness was one of the main issues that drove the country's many young people to the polling stations to press for a change of government that ushered the current leader, Nana Akufo Addo, into office.

During the election campaign some Ghanaian opposition politicians frequently cited a 2016 World Bank report on the employment situation in the country. Authored by Maddalena Honorati and Sara Johansson de Silva, the report stated that only "52% of people aged 15-24 were employed, compared to 77% of the entire population," meaning that 48% of these youths did not have jobs. Although the authors attributed the high youth unemployment rate to the fact that about one-third of the youth were active in school, the figure nonetheless underscored the challenge facing the country.

"I fear for the future of this country," candidate Akufo-Addo warned before the elections, "We must do something about the current unemployment rate in Ghana because if care is not taken, something bad may happen." That may have been a subtle reference to some countries in Africa (Nigeria and Somalia, for example) where young people are easily recruited to join armed groups or rebel forces.

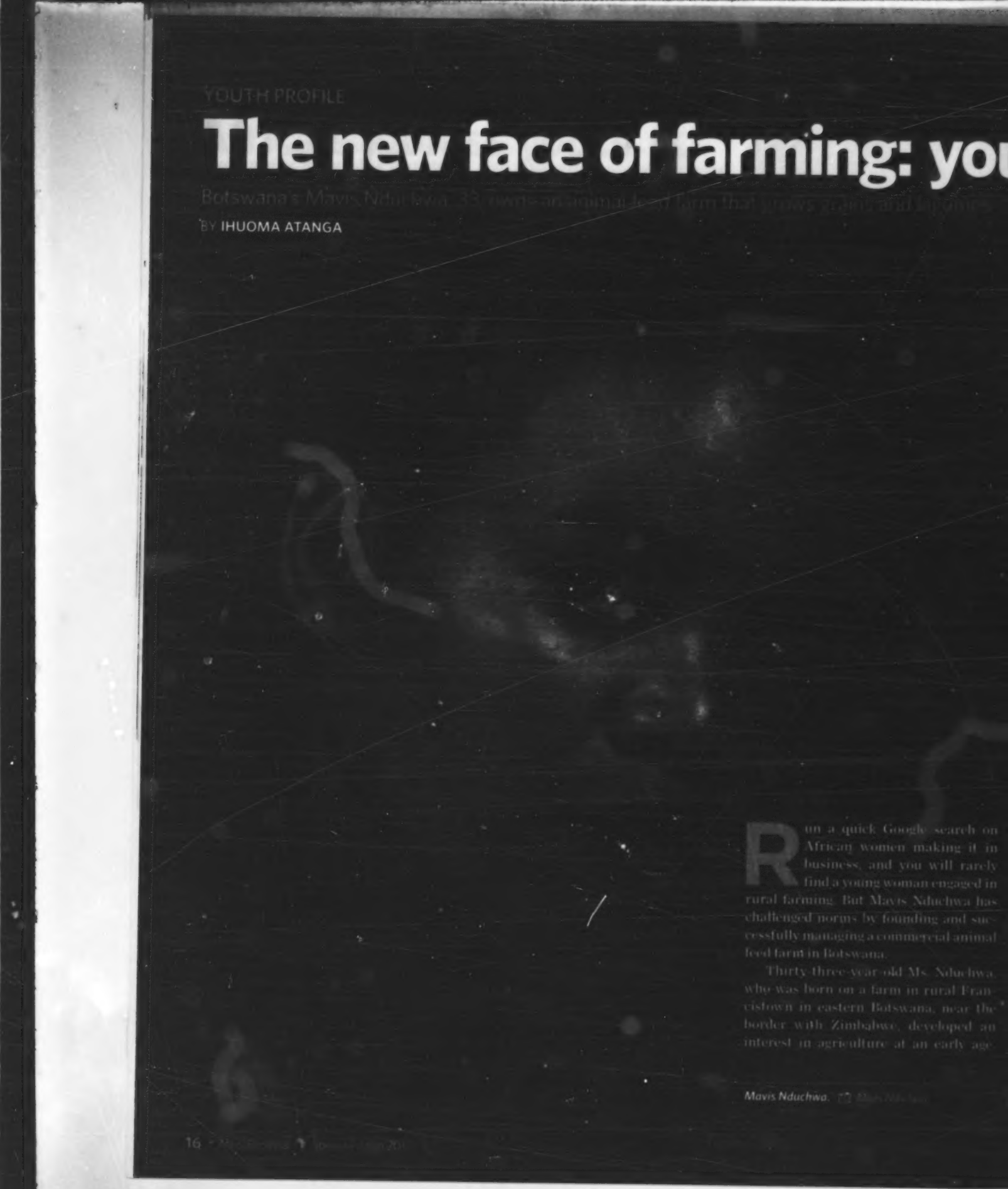
A World Bank survey in 2011 showed that about 40% of those who join rebel movements say they were driven by a lack of jobs.

YOUTH PROFILE

The new face of farming: yo

Botswana's Mavis Nduchwa, 33, owns an animal feed farm that grows [illegible]

BY IHUOMA ATANGA



Run a quick Google search on African women making it in business, and you will rarely find a young woman engaged in rural farming. But Mavis Nduchwa has challenged norms by founding and successfully managing a commercial animal feed farm in Botswana.

Thirty-three-year-old Ms. Nduchwa, who was born on a farm in rural Francistown in eastern Botswana, near the border with Zimbabwe, developed an interest in agriculture at an early age

Mavis Nduchwa. [illegible]

ıth making agribusiness 'cool'!

However, as she grew older, the allure of city life drove her to earn a degree in real estate and hospitality management. She later worked as a journalist.

But given the high cost of agricultural inputs strangling her farming community, Ms. Nduchwa sensed that affordable, locally produced animal feed as a substitute for the expensive imported kind, could boost the agribusiness sector. She quit her job in the hospitality industry and teamed up with her husband Brighton Chabana to found Chabana Farms in 2011.

Six years later, Chabana Farms has become a successful agribusiness enterprise. Ms. Nduchwa believes that women, when empowered, can achieve as much as men do. "We are all humans and thus should be given equal opportunities," she told *Africa Renewal*, noting that the future of Africa lies in agribusiness, which must be championed by the youth.

"It is important to make agriculture 'cool' in order to attract more youngsters to the sector," she says.

How "cool" it can become will depend on how profitable the agribusiness sector is and the needs it is able to meet. Chabana Farms occupies 247 acres, and grows grains and legumes such as lablab (a legume that produces high-quality forage for livestock), maize, sunflower, sorghum, beans and groundnuts.

The Botswana government recently awarded Chabana Farms a $2 million contract to supply jugo beans to the local market.

"When the rains are good, the company can easily supply the grains; but when the rains are in short supply, it becomes difficult," Ms. Nduchwa says.

Because Botswana is largely semi-arid, cultivation takes place during the rainy season, between October and April. The scarcity of grains between May and September – the dry season – makes it difficult to meet the commercial demand.

In a good rainy season, Chabana Farms can take in up to $1.5 million in profits.

Beyond its day-to-day operations, the farm, which employs 10 full-time staff, also provides six weeks-training in managing a poultry business for unemployed single mothers. Those who receive the training are able to start their own businesses.

Ms. Nduchwa says formal education has been one of her keys to success. Her degree in hospitality management equipped her with the skills needed to jump-start her agribusiness and afforded her the credibility to seek and receive funding. In 2015 she was accepted to the Tony Elumelu Entrepreneurship Programme (TEEP), the $100 million flagship entrepreneurship

> "It is important to make agriculture 'cool' in order to attract more youngsters to the sector."

programme of the Nigerian billionaire's Tony Elumelu Foundation. The foundation aims to support businesses that can contribute over a 10-year period to creating about a million new jobs and generating at least $10 billion in revenue across Africa.

TEEP entrepreneurs take part in a nine-month training programme that includes a 12-week online business plan development training and mentoring programme, followed by a two-day boot camp. After successfully completing a business plan, each entrepreneur receives a seed capital investment of $5,000. This investment does not have to be repaid. The entrepreneurs are also entitled to a second round of funding, structured as a loan of $3,000 or the equivalent in equity.

Chabana Farms also produces poultry and eggs, a branch of business that employs women in Francistown and beyond. Educating and employing women in neighbouring towns and villages allows Ms. Nduchwa to expand her business far beyond Francistown: "Our primary markets include surrounding villages, to which we sell staples like maize, beans, eggs and the like," she says.

Ms. Nduchwa says that women entrepreneurs face unique challenges: a lack of access to land, and government policies she describes as patriarchal because traditionally land is owned by men.

Another challenge is that people generally deride agriculture, particularly animal husbandry. She recommends policies that shift the perception of agriculture from "uncool" to "cool." She adds that youth education curricula should be restructured to make it relevant to the current job market and to promote agriculture, as this is the bedrock of economic growth in Africa.

To achieve the second Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 2), which is to end hunger, Ms. Nduchwa adds that an agripreneur (an agriculture entrepreneur) needs "ease of access to financing and subsidies, as this would solve most of the problems we currently face."

Reflecting on her own experience and outlook on women's empowerment, she says, "There is no special career for a man; it's not a man's world. The future of Africa is in our [women's] hands."

Ms. Nduchwa believes the future is bright for agribusiness in Botswana. Her venture continues to employ women, while her training projects equip farmers in neighbouring villages with the skills and resources to expand other sectors of agribusiness.

The company's achievements – including its healthy bank balances – give Chabana Farms major cool points.

It's time for young people to get political

Zambia's youngest mayor urges youth to get active in politics

BY **MWIKA SIMBEYE**

For many young people in Africa, a university degree opens the door to a decent job and a comfortable life. At university, however, not every student will focus on their studies; some often lose concentration as they enjoy a new-found freedom from what they perceive as the overbearing influence of parents or guardians.

Fewer students even consider leadership opportunities in student union politics, let alone leadership within the larger society.

For Christopher Kang'ombe, a desire to improve the students' welfare led him to compete for a leadership position at the Copperbelt University in Kitwe, the second largest university in Zambia. He wanted to improve poor and inadequate accommodation on campus and expedite the release of bursaries.

It was a dream come true when he won elections to become president of the student union in 2006. That same year, at 21 and while still studying for his mechanical engineering degree, Mr. Kang'ombe ran and won national elections as a local government councillor for Riverside Ward, Kwacha Constituency of Kitwe, which includes the university town of Kitwe. He became the first university student to be elected a councillor in Zambia.

Not surprisingly, his political ascendancy met stiff opposition from those who questioned his experience and maturity. When he contested as a councillor, opponents argued that a student should be busy studying, not engaging in politics.

"When I was distributing my campaign fliers, some people told me that they would not vote for me because I should be focusing on earning my engineering degree and not pursuing political office," Mr. Kang'ombe told *Africa Renewal*.

He won anyway and five years later, in 2011, he was re-elected. In his campaign, he promised to increase economic opportunities,

The Mayor of Kitwe, Mr Christopher Kang'ombe, who is also the president of the Local Government Association of Zambia, paying a courtesy call on Policy Monitoring & Research Centre Executive Director Bernadette Deka and her research team in February 2017.

improve infrastructure, particularly roads and the provision of street lights.

Just last September, Mr. Kang'ombe was elected as Kitwe's first executive mayor under a new local government structure. For just being able to canvass for votes and win a competitive mayoral position, he cemented his reputation as an astute young politician and his party thereafter nominated him for president of the Local Government Association of Zambia.

Before the election, he had played a crucial role in convincing the central government to construct a bridge in his area to link it to a nearby farming community.

Now 32 years old, Mr. Kang'ombe heads the country's association of local governments, which comprises all city and town councils in the country. His effective leadership skills are anchored in his ability to understand people's problems and articulate solutions. For example, when the city was overwhelmed with street vendors displaying their wares in the streets, he helped convince them to move to designated trading areas, averting incessant police arrests. As a student union leader, he encouraged the university authorities to expand their range of courses, especially in the schools of business and forestry.

"My success is for young people and my failure can easily be an indictment on our capacity as youth to be successful," he said, adding: "This is the right time for young people to get involved in politics and other forms of leadership and help reclaim the public's faith in politics and national leadership."

Navigating Zambia's highly charged political atmosphere is something that Mr. Kang'ombe appears to have mastered. In Zambia, as in many African countries, partisan politics can sometimes involve personal attacks and mudslinging. His 2013 memoir titled "Students Reclaim a Place in Society" powerfully encapsulates a message of the leadership role of the youth in society. The foreword to the book was written by Zambia's former president, the late Michael Sata, who bemoaned the limited role students were playing in national development.

On how he goes about his duties, Mr. Kang'ombe says: "I make sure I am accessible to people of the city and as such my schedule is designed so that every afternoon of every working day is dedicated to meeting citizens who wish to see me on any issue that they need addressed." It is this novel leadership style that has earned him bipartisan support.

The primary role of local councils is to provide basic services for the under privileged, he says. Mr. Kang'ombe has identified proper land allocation, among others, as a priority area. "Proper allocation of affordable land to citizens is critical and my team will endeavour to achieve this." Citizens usually criticize the current land allocation system in which land advertised for sale is corruptly sold to rich and powerful individuals.

A key factor about youth leadership is that youth issues also become a priority. For example, Mr. Kang'ombe wants to ensure the revival of recreational facilities and establishment of new ones for youths. He is also organizing young people into small cooperatives for easy access to financing for business.

As head of Zambia's local government association, the young mayor will have an opportunity to engage with colleagues in other countries under the aegis of the United Cities of Local Governments of Africa (UCLGA). The association meets regularly to devise solutions to development issues in Africa, such as how to mitigate the effects of climate change and promote efficiency in local governments.

Married with two children, Mr. Kang'ombe attributes his achievements to life's lessons learned during his formative years at the university. He learned that beyond acquiring a certificate, concepts taught in class could be applied in everyday life. He also developed an appreciation of the role that public service can play in improving people's lives.

His message to other youths is: "Now is our time as young people to achieve and if there is anything that fellow young people can learn from my experience, it is that anything is possible."

YOUTH PROFILE

Young women breaking into the male-dominated ICT world

One of Africa's leading tech start-up spreads its wings

BY **KWAMBOKA OYARO**

1

2

It was a bright morning in March 2010, when a group of tech-savvy youths converged at a small hall in Nairobi to discuss innovation and technology. Four young women exchanged phone numbers, clearly excited by plans they shared that would put some of the novel ideas they discussed to good use.

That was an auspicious week for Judith Ogiwar, Linda Kamau, Angela Lungati and Marie Githinji, all graduates of information technology-related courses. It was the week they launched AkiraChix, a non-profit organization that aims to entice girls to embrace technology and offer them free basic training in information communications and technology (ICT) and entrepreneurship. The word Akira is Japanese for intelligence, while Chix is slang for girls.

That year, AkiraChix began training young people, mostly girls, in basic computer skills. They held classes outdoors and used laptops to train the enthusiastic young students.

"AkiraChix's desire is to pass skills to young girls to enable them to appreciate technology as a viable career path and not a 'boys only' club," says Angela, a software development graduate of Strathmore University and also a director at Ushahidi, a Kenyan open-source software tech company whose products are used across the world.

In seven years, AkiraChix has grown in leaps and bounds, so much so that when former US President Barack Obama visited Nairobi in 2016, he scheduled a meeting with them. Two years earlier, former United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon toured Kenya and paid AkiraChix a courtesy call, telling them: "You are the hope of Africa".

It is easy to understand why AkiraChix has been so successful. They offer more structured ICT training with full scholarships in addition to teaching their students entrepreneurship skills and mentoring them as they venture into small start-ups. Their programmes are expanding to reach under-privileged girls and young women in primary and secondary schools and at universities, including technology workers and those who wish to pursue careers in technology, making it effectively a full-service programme.

With such success, soon donors came calling. From Infodev (the World Bank Innovation and Entrepreneurship arm), which first saw AkiraChix's potential, to Google Rise, iHub, Computer Aid, Seneca Group, the Kenyan government and many others, they rushed to provide financial support. AkiraChix relies on grants and other external support for their services, giving hundreds of young women, especially from less privileged backgrounds, a chance to explore careers in technology. More than 60

students have earned diplomas in information technology and entrepreneurship.

When *Africa Renewal* visited their office in the capital Nairobi in January 2017, it found 22 eager young women in one classroom. They had come early for their hardware engineering class that Friday morning. Each student was working on a laptop provided by AkiraChix for the 12-month course. The students have two daily classes, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. They get free lunch, and this allows many of the girls to remain in class the whole day. The curriculum encompasses basic computer skills, programming (for both mobile and web applications), graphic design, entrepreneurship and business development.

"We have had women mentors, women who had dreams and went ahead to work on them, so why not us? Why not me?" Valerie Khavai, 22, asked *Africa Renewal* rhetorically.

Valerie wants to be a computer programmer when she completes the one-year course and probably start her own business and employ other young women. But before then, she is taking every chance to share the knowledge she gets at the institution with friends back home in Kibera, Africa's biggest slum, which is near the training centre.

"I tell the girls in my neighborhood that it doesn't matter where they come from or where they are but where they are going," says Valerie. That's the mantra she picked up from the mentors from the IT industry who visit them regularly to motivate and urge them to achieve their dreams.

Regina Wanjiru, 22, sees a personal transformation in the short time she has been in the new class. "I know now that a woman can do anything if she puts her mind on it," she says with confidence, adding that the AkiraChix story of innovation makes her feel like she is on the verge of changing the world.

The AkiraChix founders have influenced the girls' perception of life, motivated by their memories of being among the very few women in IT classes while at university.

How it was born

Since the four founders of AkiraChix met in March 2010 at the Nairobi i-hub—an open space where tech innovators meet to share ideas—they've gone from a group of four dreamers in a rented office along Nairobi's Ngong Road with 20 students to a highly professional and accomplished company much in demand worldwide.

One of the teachers, Clarence Killa, says the programme is so widely-respected that nearly all the students are assured of placement upon graduation. Some go on to start their own businesses.

"Most of my 2016 students are now employed," says Killa, a trainer in hardware engineering. "Two are being incubated in two tech companies and a few are on internship. They are confident of getting jobs when they complete the internship."

Marie, one of the founders, says AkiraChix has transformed the lives of young women within a short time: "We have seen them grow from not knowing how to switch on a computer to doing amazing layouts in graphics design, coding and coming up with new applications for mobile phones."

1. Judith Oghwo. 2. Angela Lungati. 3. Kenya's President Uhuru Kenyatta visiting AkiraChix centre in Nairobi. 4. Linda Kamau. 5. Marie Githinji. 6. Graduation at AkiraChix.
© AkiraChix

YOUTH PROFILE

Nollywood star: More than just talent

Award-winning Stephanie Okereke Linus raising awareness on fistula

BY **LEON USIGBE**

While still in her teens, Stephanie Okereke Linus was not just talented but also a rising star in Nigeria's film industry, commonly known as Nollywood. What propelled her into stardom, however, was a socially and culturally complex movie on sexuality, *Emotional Crack*, directed by the prolific filmmaker Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen.

By 17, Ms. Linus, an ambitious student studying English and Literary Studies at the University of Calabar (UNICAL), already had two Nollywood films under her belt—*Compromise 2* and *Waterloo*, after which she tried her hand as director in Teco Benson's blockbuster film *Terror*.

When the opportunity came her way, Ms. Linus stepped forward without hesitation. Her outstanding performance in *Emotional Crack* earned eight awards and opened the door to new vistas and roles, including directing a film on another challenging subject —fistula.

The movie *Dry*, released in 2014, burnished her reputation as a major director and humanitarian. The film's theme focuses on fistula—a devastating condition afflicting women, mostly in war zones and where child marriage and teenage pregnancy are common. It is caused by prolonged obstructed labour or sexual violence and leaves the victim incontinent of urine or feces or both. Unable to control these discharges, the girl or woman is often rejected by her community.

Dry tells the story of a 13-year-old girl, Halima, whose poor uneducated parents marry her off to a 60-year-old man, who constantly rapes her. Halima gets pregnant and suffers obstetric fistula during child delivery. She's abandoned by her husband and discriminated against in the society.

Zara (Ms. Linus), a medical doctor who also suffered a horrific childhood meets Halima; she tries to help her get through her situation and also save other young women in similar circumstances.

"I wanted to raise awareness about the condition and to help prevent more women and girls from becoming victims. I also wanted to inform women that repair surgeries are available and can correct fistula. Poor women can get free surgeries financed by donors," she told *Africa Renewal*.

The movie has received several awards, including the prestigious 12th Africa Movie Academy Awards and the 2016 Africa Magic Viewers' Choice Awards, for best overall movie.

Dry's powerful message caught the attention of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the lead UN agency responsible for promoting reproductive health issues, including safe pregnancy and childbirth.

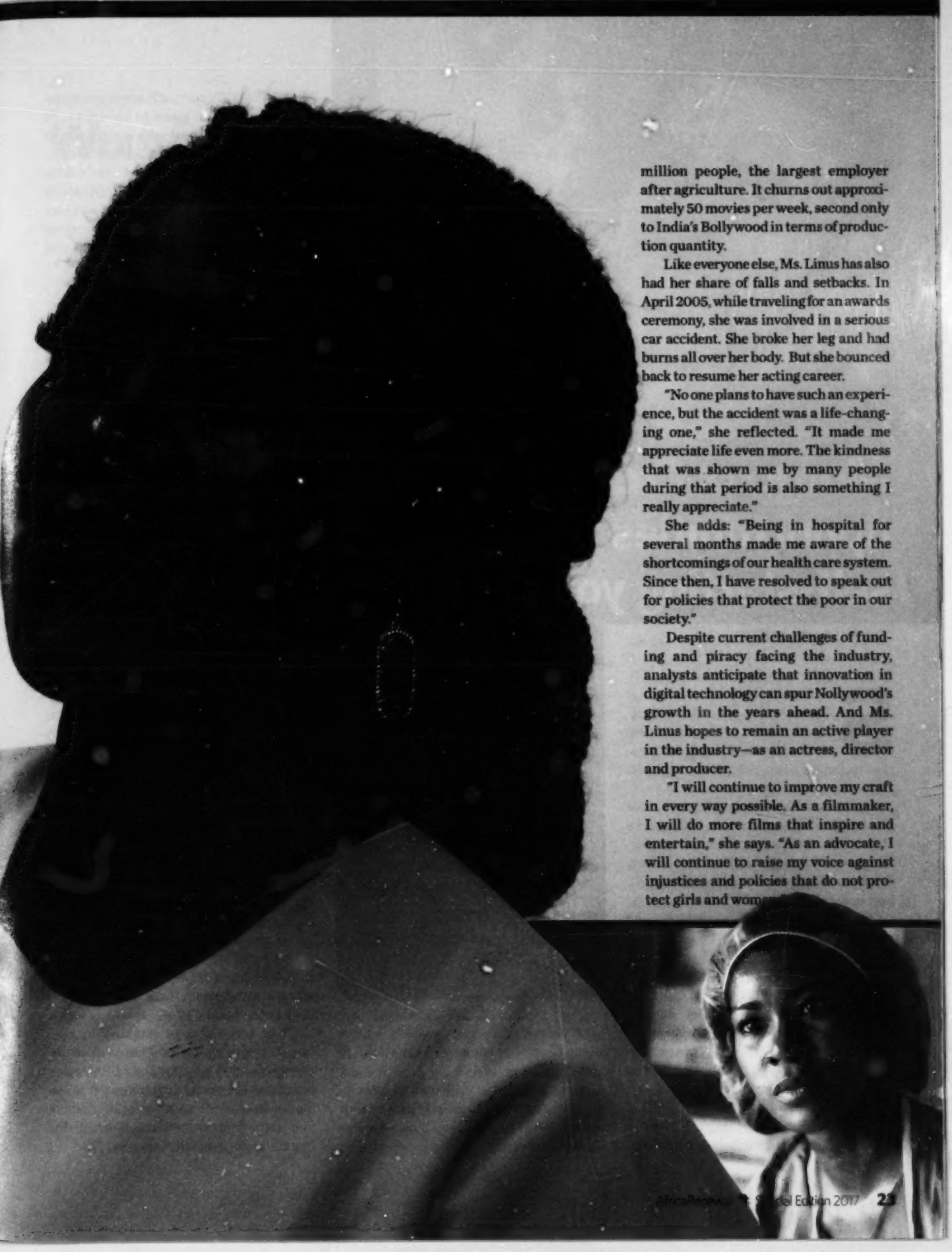
"I recently screened the movie in Gambia in partnership with UNFPA. A month after the screening, to our delight, [former] President Yahya Jammeh banned child marriage in the country. We hope to screen the movie in many more places," she adds.

So far, Ms. Linus, now a mother of one, has starred in more than 90 movies since 1997 when she began her acting career and has become widely popular on the continent and beyond, where Nollywood films are staples for movie consumers.

She has won numerous awards including eight nominations at the 2003 Reel Awards, receiving awards for Best Actress in English and Actress of the Year 2003. She also won the 2006 Afro Hollywood Award for Best Actress, and received nominations for various acting roles at the Africa Movie Academy Awards in 2005, 2009 and 2010.

A highpoint of her career was in 2011 when Nigeria's former president Goodluck Jonathan conferred on her one of the country's highest honours, Member of the Order of the Federal Republic.

Nollywood contributes some $7.2 billion (about 1.4%) to Nigeria's GDP, according to the country's National Bureau of Statistics. The industry employs up to a



million people, the largest employer after agriculture. It churns out approximately 50 movies per week, second only to India's Bollywood in terms of production quantity.

Like everyone else, Ms. Linus has also had her share of falls and setbacks. In April 2005, while traveling for an awards ceremony, she was involved in a serious car accident. She broke her leg and had burns all over her body. But she bounced back to resume her acting career.

"No one plans to have such an experience, but the accident was a life-changing one," she reflected. "It made me appreciate life even more. The kindness that was shown me by many people during that period is also something I really appreciate."

She adds: "Being in hospital for several months made me aware of the shortcomings of our health care system. Since then, I have resolved to speak out for policies that protect the poor in our society."

Despite current challenges of funding and piracy facing the industry, analysts anticipate that innovation in digital technology can spur Nollywood's growth in the years ahead. And Ms. Linus hopes to remain an active player in the industry—as an actress, director and producer.

"I will continue to improve my craft in every way possible. As a filmmaker, I will do more films that inspire and entertain," she says. "As an advocate, I will continue to raise my voice against injustices and policies that do not protect girls and wom

YOUTH PROFILE

Morocco: Creating IT opportunities for self-starting youth

BY **KACI RACELMA**

Soufian El-Kherchi, an intern at Clean Rabat, a small organization in Morocco's capital, spent most of his days giving information technology support and setting up its network.

Bustling with ideas and plans for the future, Mr. El-Kherchi, a computer science major, looked forward to formal employment after his internship. However, one day he got thinking about starting his own IT business.

"I had acquired enough experience and after analysing the situation, I wanted to set up my own business," he told *Africa Renewal*.

So, at the age of 24, Mr. El-Kherchi borrowed 6,000 dirhams (about $600) from family and friends to get started. In July 2016, he launched Universal Innovation and Development (UNOVADEV), to provide IT services, vocational training, as well as import and export services.

In less than six months, UNOVADEV had eight clients including hospitals, schools, education centres and marketing companies.

> Our strategy is to establish locally-based structures, called *Maison du Jeune Entrepreneur* (Home for Young Entrepreneurs), where young people can get information in creating and developing companies in the rural areas.

"To me, it's a success, especially because all my clients are happy with my work," he says.

On average, Mr. El-Kherchi, now 26, makes up to $10,000 in profits a month, not bad at all for a company that is hardly a year old.

UNOVADEV currently employs a dozen young people and plans to hire more. "I would like to train talented young people and create more jobs and wealth," Mr. El-Kherchi told *Africa Renewal*. "For example, I plan to recruit two young people in the next two months—a web developer and a graphic designer. I will also employ several trainers to expand our training project."

Not all rosy

However, it has not been all smooth for the young entrepreneur. He had to contend with red tape when he was registering his company. There was not much information available on the procedure, forcing him to turn to friends and the internet for specific details, including filling out numerous government documents.

But he was undeterred despite being from a generation of young people who are in a rush. "Time is money," he repeated often during the *Africa Renewal* interview.

Mr. El-Kherchi says young people ought to acquire skills in IT, to widen their vision of the world and become more creative. "The IT industry is an interesting as well as challenging industry nowadays; everything must be in compliance with IT requirements. The world is advancing by leaps and bounds so that we as individuals are obliged to adapt or be left out."

To the young people who want to venture into business, he has one message: "You should never give up. You must have self-confidence and not be discouraged by anything."

Unemployment is on the rise in Morocco, with many people without jobs, including young people with college degrees, according to official figures. To deal with the problem, local authorities are helping young people set up their own businesses and increase productivity.

One example is the creation of a foundation in 2010 to promote entrepreneurship and business ventures among the youth in rural areas, the Young Entrepreneur Foundation.

"Our strategy is to establish locally-based structures, called *Maison du Jeune Entrepreneur* (Home for Young Entrepreneurs), where young people can get information in creating and developing companies in the rural areas," Rida Lamrini, the foundation's president explains.

Women embracing entrepreneurship

BY **IHUOMA ATANGA**

Ahead of the goal of gender equality, increased political participation of women and economic empowerment lies an arduous journey for women and girls in Africa.

But despite the many challenges they face in attaining gender parity in all spheres, there is a glimmer of hope: more girls are going to school in Africa today and more women are starting to claim their place in positions of leadership than was the case two decades ago.

Although it is still a work in progress, and girls still need to be kept in school to attain up to college education and not be married off early, African women are benefiting from a formal education and are determined more than ever to create wealth for themselves, propel other women into financial independence and consequently make their contribution to the economy.

One of the roads most travelled by women and girls to escape unemployment and attain a sustainable level of economic freedom is the road of entrepreneurship.

According to the 2015 World Population Prospects, a report by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, there are more than 161 million young women between 18 and 34 years in Africa currently. Since there are not enough jobs to absorb all of them, a small percentage have ventured into independent business and with the necessary support, many more could still take the same route.

Because gender inequality deprives countries of full development potential, the participation and contribution of young women in creating viable business ventures is crucial if the continent has any hope of implementing the African Union's Agenda 2063, a 50-year development framework for the continent.

At only 28 years of age, Ngozi Opara, founder and chief executive officer of NZO Beauty, has built a huge online business around hair extensions and owns a hair salon in Washington DC, US.

In an interview with *Africa Renewal*, she acknowledged that her training in finance, alongside funding opportunities, has helped young women like herself to build solid enterprises. She said she wanted to offer unique and innovative products to the huge market at home.

Fashion designer Ejiro A. Tafiri, 28, and her team in their workshop in Lagos, Nigeria. Photo/A. E.

"My educational background is in finance and accounting and these helped me become a problem solver, numbers savvy, and an outside-the-box thinker," she says. "In business, these are all qualities and characteristics that help you grow and sustain your business."

Although she thought she was equipped with entrepreneurship skills, navigating the business world in Africa and Asia proved to be much more challenging than expected.

"There are many challenges associated with being a young African businesswoman. My industry is male-dominated, yet black women are the primary consumers, so I am a threat to them," said Ms. Opara, describing her experience while marketing the flagship brand of her business—heat-free hair.

Gender activists say that without legal frameworks to protect girls and young women from patriarchal structures that shut them out of economic development, women will always be disadvantaged, be it in business or employment. In some communities women are not allowed to own land, let alone use it as collateral to get a bank loan.

In sub-Saharan Africa, gender gaps in the labour market reduce the gross domestic product per capita by nearly 9%. But those gaps are narrowing as women's labour force participation rate in the region has been steadily rising. Between 1990 and 2013 participation increased from 59% to 64%, according to the Progress of The World's Women 2015-2016 report. Although this is a small increase, young African women are beginning to take the opportunities offered by entrepreneurship and move into business.

Meanwhile, organisations looking to fill gender unemployment gaps have started to establish platforms that would educate, mentor and support young African women to grow and sustain viable business ventures in various fields.

An example of one such company is She Leads Africa, a female-led pan-African start-up based in Nigeria. Founded by two young West African women, Yasmin Belo-Osagie (Nigerian) and Afua Osei (Ghanaian), the organization provides training and mentorship opportunities to help young women build successful careers in business.

She Leads Africa provides intensive business training boot camps called

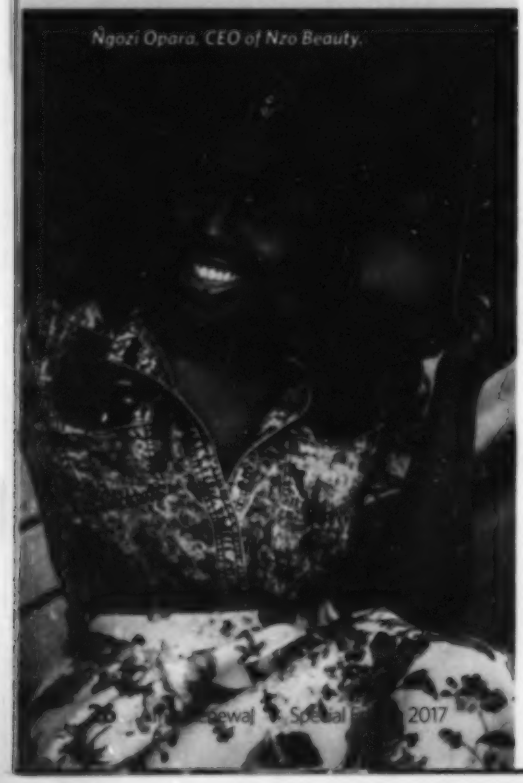
'SheHives', offering pitch competitions to help women acquire funding for their businesses in major sub-Saharan African cities such as Lagos, Johannesburg and Accra, as well as New York and London. They also offer free access to online articles and live-streamed webinars where women worldwide can join in, receive free training and get their business questions answered.

The organization, albeit young, has trained and mentored more than 200,000 women and girls in over 30 African countries.

Opportunities for women and girls to thrive in their careers are crucial to the advancement of women and their potential contribution to the African economy.

To boost tools and policies needed for young women to thrive, governments and the society need to do more to promote gender equality in all spheres of life, a process that is painfully slow at the moment. If progress remains at the current pace, it will take about 50 years to achieve gender parity in parliament, and 80 years to achieve equality in economic participation, according to UN Women, the United Nations agency that promotes gender equality and the empowerment of women.

For women and girls, being able to make significant contributions to their economies means more than being responsible citizens. It means the ability to choose one's path in life, to create wealth and to grow.



Ngozi Opara, CEO of Nzo Beauty.

VIOLENCE

Who will protect our girls?

More efforts required to end harmful cultural practices and violence against girls

BY **PAVITHRA RAO**

As a young girl Consolee Nishimwe experienced the worst form of violence any girl barely in her teens could possibly face. At the height of the 1994 Rwanda genocide, machete-wielding rebels were targeting families like hers, forcing them to move from place to place under cover of night.

It was during this time that one of her neighbours grabbed and raped her repeatedly. Soon the rebels caught up with the family and killed her father and brothers, forcing Consolee to flee her country. Now in her 30s and living in the United States, Consolee has recounted her experience in a book, *Tested to the Limit: A Genocide Survivor's Story of Pain, Resilience and Hope*. She is often invited to public forums to speak against gender-based violence.

Consolee's experience reflects the tragedy faced by thousands of girls during the Rwanda genocide and in other African countries in conflict, including the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan. As in many parts of the world, during times of civil unrest, rape quickly becomes a weapon of war.

Worldwide, seven out of ten women face physical or sexual violence at least once during their lifetime, according to UN Women, the global agency responsible for advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Harmful practice

Yet, rape is just but one of many acts of violence or harmful cultural practices that girls in Africa continue to face. Others include female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced early marriages. Despite years of advocacy against FGM, it is still performed on thousands of girls and many more are being forced to become child brides, at times when the girls are as young as nine. Combined, these practices produce

dangerous reproductive health issues such as teen pregnancies, abortions, fistula or even child and maternal deaths.

In countries like Somalia, for instance, up to 98% of all girls between the ages of five and 15 undergo FGM, a practice in which parts of their genitalia are excised and the torn flesh sewn up for non-medical reasons by untrained traditional practitioners, usually elderly women using unsterilized instruments such as razor blades.

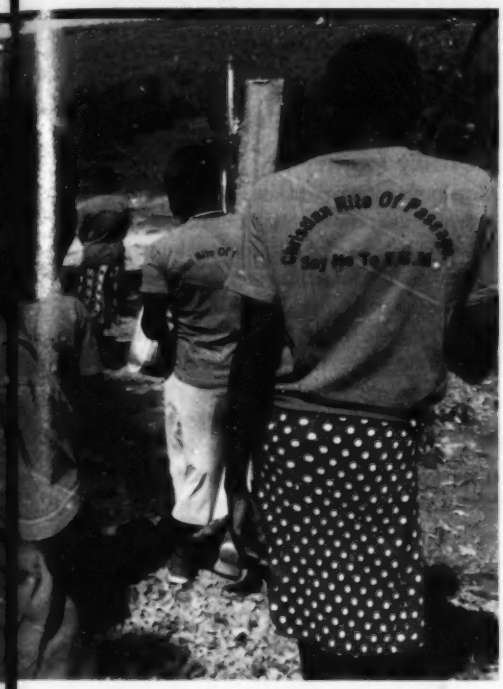
Medical experts warn that FGM can lead to long-term mental and physical problems, which may include possibly fatal septic shock, haemorrhage and blood poisoning, according to the UN Population Fund (UNFPA).

Long-term effects of FGM include urinary incontinence, painful sexual intercourse and complications during and after childbirth. Both mother and foetus could die at birth; mothers who survive

may go on to suffer debilitating post-natal complications.

Countries with high FGM prevalence tend to have maternal mortality ratios of 550 per 100,000 live births. In South Africa, where FGM is outlawed under the Children's Act, maternal mortality ratio is 300 per 100,000 live births.

According to UNICEF, maternal mortality, referring to deaths due to complications from pregnancy or childbirth, has declined by 44%—from 385 deaths to 216 deaths per 100,000 live births—in the period from 1990 to 2015, for an annual rate of reduction of 2.3%. While impressive, this was less than half the 5.5% annual rate needed to achieve the three-quarters reduction in maternal mortality under the Millennium Development Goals.



Schoolgirls during an awareness program ceremony against circumcision (FGM) in Nakuru, Kenya. Alamy

Even as women's rights advocates continue to call for a total ban on the harmful practice worldwide, some Africans in the diaspora reportedly still ship their girls back home to undergo the procedure. The BBC reported in July 2015 that about 50 such girls based in the United Kingdom had been whisked to Somalia to undergo FGM.

Given its harmful effects, why is FGM still practised in Africa? The World Health Organisation (WHO) blames it on sociocultural, psychosexual, religious and hygienic beliefs, including the social pressure to conform as well as to ensure a girl's eligibility for marriage.

Child marriage

Underage girls married off to adults are more exposed to gender-based violence, with studies showing that child brides are more likely to be beaten by their husbands than those who married as adults.

"The greater the age difference between girls and their husbands, the more likely they are to experience intimate partner violence," says Girls Not Brides, a global partnership of civil society organizations fighting to end child marriage.

Worldwide, there are more than 700 million woman alive today who were married as children, with the top five countries being in Africa, according to UN Women. With 76% of its girls entering child marriages, Niger ranks first, followed by Central African Republic and Chad (both at 68%), Mali (55%) and Burkina Faso, Guinea and South Sudan (all at 52%).

Forcing children into marriages is a human rights violation, because, among other consequences, they are stripped of their right to education. UNICEF reported in 2016 that girls who attend school acquire education, marry later when they are more mature and are better equipped to improve their overall socioeconomic and emotional well-being.

"We have a crisis on our hands. The UN estimates that globally 15 million girls experience child marriage each year," says Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda, the African Union goodwill ambassador on ending child marriage in Africa.

No contraception

The negative consequences of early marriages are exacerbated by a lack of access to contraception and reproductive education, says UNFPA, and child wives are more prone to complications from early pregnancy, childbirth, or sexually transmitted diseases.

Up to half of teenage pregnancies worldwide (under the age of 20) occur in sub-Saharan Africa. The Democratic Republic of the Congo and Ethiopia rank high on adolescent pregnancy rates, according to WHO.

The key to preventing pregnancies by underage, teenage or otherwise unprepared women is to raise awareness of the benefits of reproductive health, says the US-based Guttmacher Institute's Center for Population Research Innovation and Dissemination. A research and policy organization for reproductive health, the center maintains that with enhanced awareness about reproductive health, unintended pregnancies could drop by up to 83%.

Further, if health services, including the distribution of contraceptives, were adequately administered, deaths from unsafe abortions could decrease by 84%, the center has found. Abortions are banned in most African countries with the exception of Cape Verde, Mozambique, South Africa and Tunisia, among a few.

Tackling the problems

As experts continue to seek ways to protect the African girl, some countries have come up with laws to protect girls from FGM and other harmful cultural practices. Twenty-four African countries, including Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Kenya and Nigeria, now impose stiff penalties of between six months and life imprisonment on offenders. The results have been encouraging, with many countries witnessing declining numbers.

Meanwhile, some countries are making slow but steady progress in their efforts to stamp out child marriages. For instance, in July 2016 the Gambian government declared marrying girls under the age of 18 a crime and offenders could be locked up for up to 20 years in prison. The practice is also outlawed in Tanzania.

In 2015, the UN held its first African Girl's Summit on Ending Child Marriage. Measures to enforce making 18 the legal marriageable age and imposing penalties for offenders were discussed. As usual, participating countries made the right speeches and committed to the cause. The coming years will determine if they match words with actions.

Speaking at the recent International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation, UN Women Executive Director, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, called for a "gender-equal world, where girls have choices for their future", free from FGM and gender-based violence.

Migration: taking rickety boats to Europe

Poverty and lack of opportunities force African youth to risk all in search of jobs abroad

BY **EFAM AWO DOVI**

Migrants from Africa and elsewhere rescued from a smuggler's boat by an Italian naval ship in the Mediterranean. UNHCR/A. D'Amato

The images are disturbing—hundreds of desperate young African men crowded shoulder to shoulder on rickety boats in the Mediterranean Sea, sailing toward an unknown future in Europe.

The story of this exodus, starting with long journeys through the punishing desert to North Africa, where they board the boats, is heart-rending. The fatalities are high. Yet daily more depart their home countries on similar journeys.

Amadou left Senegal with his younger brother in 2016 for Italy. "I saw a lot of my friends who had been to Europe come back to Senegal with money and build houses for themselves," he said, adding that many of his friends left without any documents.

"I thought I could be one of them," Amadou wrote for "I Am a Migrant", a campaign sponsored by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) that gives migrants a platform to tell their migration stories.

After a perilous journey, Amadou and his 16-year-old brother reached the shores of Libya, where he found a job in a small boutique to save money for the next leg of his voyage to Italy. But even after working for days on end, he was not able to save enough.

Then one day his brother was killed. "They attacked him in broad daylight in the city centre. They asked him for money, but he didn't have any...so they shot him," Amadou recalled. His family begged him to return home.

"I did everything I could to make it back," he wrote, and described his experience while in Niger—a major transit point for West African migrants—where IOM provides support for stranded migrants like him, helping them to make a safe return home.

Amadou had sold all his father's sheep, promising to replace them once he got to Italy. "But I never made it to Italy. If I find work in Senegal, I will stay there, but if I don't, I might try my luck once more."

A Deadly Journey

Amadou is not alone in the desire to risk all to take the dreaded trip to Europe in the hope of finding a job. In many other African countries, men between the ages of 18 and 40 years head to North Africa every year along well-established migrant smuggling routes, then board boats to cross the Mediterranean into Europe.

To reach North Africa they travel for days under harsh desert weather conditions, suffering abuse from people smugglers and criminal networks while parting with huge sums of money for the journey. A good number get stranded in transit countries, forcing some to return to their countries of origin.

One migrant from Sierra Leone, who embarked on the trip with two of his sons, told aid workers in Niger how their driver abandoned them in the desert for days until they had to turn back. An amputee since he was young, he had not had an easy life, he said. He hoped to educate his boys, 9 and 18, in Italy so they could have a better future.

Even when migrants from all over Africa reach Libya en route to Europe, their safety is not guaranteed due to instability in that country. "There are so many [migrants] in prison in Libya that can't get out because they have no money. You have no money, you don't get out. Or you die. It's simple," Amadou wrote.

Still, some of these African migrants manage to reach Europe by the Mediterranean on life rafts or overloaded boats, paying $3,000 to $5,000 per person per trip. Many others die trying.

In 2015 alone some 171,000 migrants arrived in Italy from North Africa, the highest number ever recorded, beating the

2014 record of 170,100, according to Italian authorities.

The year 2016 broke another record—as the deadliest for those trying to reach Europe by sea. IOM's Missing Migrants Project recorded 5,085 migrants and refugee deaths in the Mediterranean, compared to 3,777 the previous year and 3,279 in 2014.

"Many of them have friends or relatives who have already settled in Europe and aim towards the same goal, unaware of what they will encounter on the route," says Monica Chiriac of the IOM office in Niger.

Push Factors

"There are different reasons why people migrate, but sometimes it's like jumping without a parachute. You have no other choice," Emmanuel, a Somali Christian living in Luxembourg, who fled the largely Muslim country with the help of the Catholic Church, wrote on the I Am a Migrant website.

IOM says the vast majority of African migrants heading to Europe through the Mediterranean are from Eritrea (fleeing repression and compulsory military service), Somalia (escaping extreme poverty, political instability and insecurity), and Sudan (fleeing armed conflicts).

Others topping the migration traffic list include Nigeria, Gambia, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Mali, Senegal and, to a lesser extent, Ghana, in that order.

Ms. Chiriac from the IOM says that for most young West Africans, "few economic opportunities in their own countries and hope for a better future" are the major drivers.

Emmanuel Asante, from the Brong Ahafo Region, which accounts for the majority of illegal migration traffic from Ghana, made the dangerous journey to Libya with a group of young friends in 2007. He had trained as an auto electrician, and was saving money to set up a workshop.

"I had no intention of going to Europe. I had heard that crossing the Mediterranean was not easy," recalls Mr. Asante.

In Tripoli, Libya's capital, he worked at a construction site and remitted some $150 every month to buy a piece of land back home. In 2010 he returned home with a savings of about $3,000 to invest. Now, at 33 years old, Mr. Asante owns an auto electrical shop but laments that business is not good. This time he wants to make the whole journey and reach Europe.

"Migrants have come to believe that the only way to make it in life is to leave the country," says Kwadwo Boakye-Yiadom of Migrant Watch & Skilled Revolution Front, a local NGO operating in Nkronza South in the Brong Ahafo Region, which raises awareness about the dangers of resorting to the risky migrant routes.

Despite the dangers migrants confront along the way, the fruits of reaching Europe are evidenced all around them, such as in the Gambian village of Sabaa and in the Ghanaian area of Nkoranza, where grass-thatched huts have given way to permanent homes over the years. These were financed mostly with remittances from relatives abroad.

"People as young as 14 and 15 in junior high school aim to go to Libya and then Europe," Mr. Boakyi-Yiadom told *Africa Renewal*. "Some of them know the dangers but will still yield to peer pressure. There are not many economic activities going on here."

Adanse Aikins, a teacher at Nkoranza Technical Institute, blames the trend on poverty. "Their parents are mostly subsistence farmers who are unable to make a living to support them through school," he says.

Mr. Aikins, a part-time farmer, himself says changing weather patterns and lack of access to funding have made farming, the main occupation in the area, unattractive.

A global trend

The last 15 years have seen a sharp increase in the number of people on the move globally in pursuit of better lives and work abroad. That number reached 244 million by 2015, according to the United Nations' *International Migration Report 2015*. Contrary to common perceptions, Africans make up only 14% of the total number, or 34 million migrants in 2015. And they do not necessarily head for developed countries.

Indeed, Africa is the major host for intra-regional migration. Kenya and South Africa, with their better-performing economies, are major recipients of mixed migration—refugees and irregular and economic migrants—from other African countries, according to the Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat (RMMS), an organization that supports agencies in the Horn of Africa and Yemen in managing and protecting migrants.

No Quick Fix

"If people don't have livelihoods at all, they are not going to sit and die of hunger, they are going to look for greener pastures," counseled Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, former head of the African Union Commission, speaking to reporters in Brussels following a meeting on the migrant crisis with European Union Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker in 2015.

Africans, she said, needs education, skills, and the opportunities provided by modern industries. "We don't have an instant solution," she said. And many agree.

Some development experts argue that the EU approach under the 2016 Partnership Framework Agreement on Migration, which seeks to reinforce cooperation with third-world countries to better manage migration, cannot stop the tide, as development aid takes a while to deliver impact, if it does at all.

EU policymakers are using development aid to pressure transit and departure countries like Ethiopia, Niger, Nigeria, Mali and Senegal to implement policies that prevent migration, a move that experts say amounts to outsourcing the problem.

Mali became the first to sign on to a so-called money-for-migration deal last December and received €145.1 million in development funds in exchange for repatriating Malians who migrated illegally, creating jobs and tackling people smugglers and criminal networks wherever possible.

Slowing the flow will require awareness creation and collaboration. Also, aid takes a long time to create economic growth. In the short run it's unlikely that aid will have any noticeable effect on people's decision to migrate. Further, as aid does start to encourage growth, it may have the opposite of the intended effect on migration. In very poor countries such as Mali, emigration tends to increase with household income, as more families are able to afford the expensive up-front cost of migration.

Ultimately, however, African leaders must use the continent's vast resources to create economic opportunities to lift people out of poverty and to keep the youth, a valuable resource, at home.

Reminiscences of a former child soldier

My biggest fear was children, high on drugs, wielding AK-47 riffles

BY **MOHAMED SIDIBAY**

My name is Mohamed Sidibay and I was born in Sierra Leone, a beautiful country on the coast of West Africa.

When I had barely reached five years of age, we were engulfed in a civil war. Kidnapped by rebels, I lived in a world where my captors made me fear not God but children, high on drugs, wielding AK-47 rifles taller than them, and forced to kill or be killed.

I was one of those child soldiers and I lived in a world where your best friend could kill you because his own life depended on it.

I witnessed murder for the first time when I was only five years old. In 1997 the civil war had reached my village. It was only after I was forcibly taken away from our house that I got a sense of the evil that would befall me. The man I would later come to call General took my parents' lives before my eyes. That was the beginning of my encounter with war.

Years passed and one night I fled to Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone. It was one of the longest nights of my life. I slept on a wooden bench too small for my tall frame. I spent most of the night fighting off mosquitoes and trying to stay warm. When I woke up, I had white, salty residue on my face as a result of hours of crying. I wished things were different.

Shunned by community

An Italian priest gave me shelter and connected me to an NGO that links students and teachers worldwide through technology. This is where I started my education and was soon sponsored to join a primary school in Sierra Leone.

The war stole my childhood and left me orphaned and homeless. In Sierra Leone, children barely old enough to tie their own shoelaces committed most of the atrocities. I was one of those children. I learned to refill a bullet chamber instead of an ink cartridge, and I mastered the "skill" of spraying a wall with lead before I could write 1, 2, and 3. At the time, the more

youthful we appeared, the more gruesome the carnage we inflicted.

Although the civil war eventually ended in 2002, a new struggle for reintegration had just begun for me. My former community shunned me, the worst punishment a close-knit community could exact on a repentant child soldier. Elders derided me for my shamelessness, and my peers were vicious towards me.

One day something unexpected happened. A complete stranger told me the truth I did not want to hear: I had the power to create my own destiny if I could get education. But how could I do that when at the age of ten I could not read or write? Where would I begin? I wondered whether education would help me forget my experience with killing in war. Would it end my nightmares?

We know all wars eventually end, but the scars and burden may last forever. But that's life, right? Things do not always turn out the way we wish.

Transformation

In 2007, at the age of 14, I was invited to talk about my experience as a child soldier at two American universities. What was meant to be a short trip became a permanent stay after I refused to board my plane home. I ran away from the airport in New York with only $40 in my pocket, an iPod Nano, my passport, a white-dotted pair of jeans and an orange shirt.

I stayed because America had given me hope. I lived in Maplewood, New Jersey, where I enrolled in high school. At the age of 14, I was preparing to attend high school for the first time in a community that was completely different from the one I had known. Reconciling the new life with the past continued to be a challenge.

I never imagined graduating from high school, let alone becoming a university graduate. Education has offered me choices, chances and challenges.

Education can enable the unfortunate to rise up and know the world. I am now dedicating my life to advocacy and service through my work with the Education Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity and the My Hero Project.

I appreciate the gift of education. I believe that even if we give people the whole world, that world could crumble. But if we give them an education, they can rebuild their world.

Mohamed Sidibay has since graduated from George Washington University.

SDG CHAMPION

Development goals in local languages

Young leader helps translate SDGs in different African languages

BY **KINGSLEY IGHOBOR**

As Ntiokam Divine from Cameroon sees it, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were crafted in the specialized parlance of development experts. To make the language understandable to a wider audience, especially among the grassroots population, 34-year old Divine is on a mission to translate the SDGs into Africa's many local vernaculars using terminology understandable to all.

His strategy involves training influential community members, particularly young people, who will in turn educate their communities using translated texts.

Since the adoption in September 2015 of the SDGs at the United Nations headquarters in New York, Mr. Divine has trained 30 members of various youth, women's organizations and civil society groups in Cameroon's capital, Yaoundé, as part of the African Youth for the Sustainable Development Goals Training (AYSDGT) programme. Although the training was in English, he told the trainees that the SDGs need to be taken to the people's doorsteps.

Following the training of youths under the auspices of the AYSDGT programme in Cameroon and Nigeria last year, Mr. Divine and other volunteers have now reached more than 2,000 young people in 11 countries who are translating SDGs into local dialects. Countries covered so far include Ghana, Kenya, Mali, Morocco, Rwanda, Togo and Zambia.

After the group translated the SDGs into Cameroonian local languages—Ewondo, Shupamum, and Basaa—the training programme has been working on establishing SDG clubs in primary, secondary and tertiary schools and getting influential community members to be SDG ambassadors in their respective localities.

Through these clubs, Mr. Divine said, young people will learn how they can join the global discussion on issues relating to their future. *And thus, African youths will better appreciate the SDGs*, he told *Africa Renewal* in an interview.

Ntiokam Divine (right) at the Climate Change Conference in Marrakech, Morocco in November 2016.

At the Marrakech Climate Change Conference (COP22) in November 2016, in Morocco, Mr. Divine assured delegates that SDGs, when translated into local languages, can have a lasting positive impact. David Nabarro, then special adviser to the UN Secretary-General on SDGs, discussed ways of implementing Mr. Divine's initiative in local communities when the two met at the COP22.

So far, Mr. Divine has translated the SDGs into 32 local languages of his native Cameroon, as well as into local languages of Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Nigeria.

In Nigeria the SDGs were translated into Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa, the country's main ethnic languages. There is also a Swahili version, which has been distributed to communities in Swahili-speaking countries such as Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo, as well as parts of Zambia, Mozambique, Malawi, Somalia, and the Comoro Islands.

Inspiring youth

A longtime activist who has participated in the International Youth Council, Earth Charter and Children of the Earth, Mr. Divine's wanderlust makes him a good fit for his current undertaking. He has travelled over the back roads of Cameroon and through close to 100 countries around the world. "I was inspired by my mother to be a committed community development worker," he says. "She encouraged me to empower youths in rural communities across Africa."

In 2009, Mr. Divine successfully organized the Stand Up campaign to promote the Millennium Development Goals in

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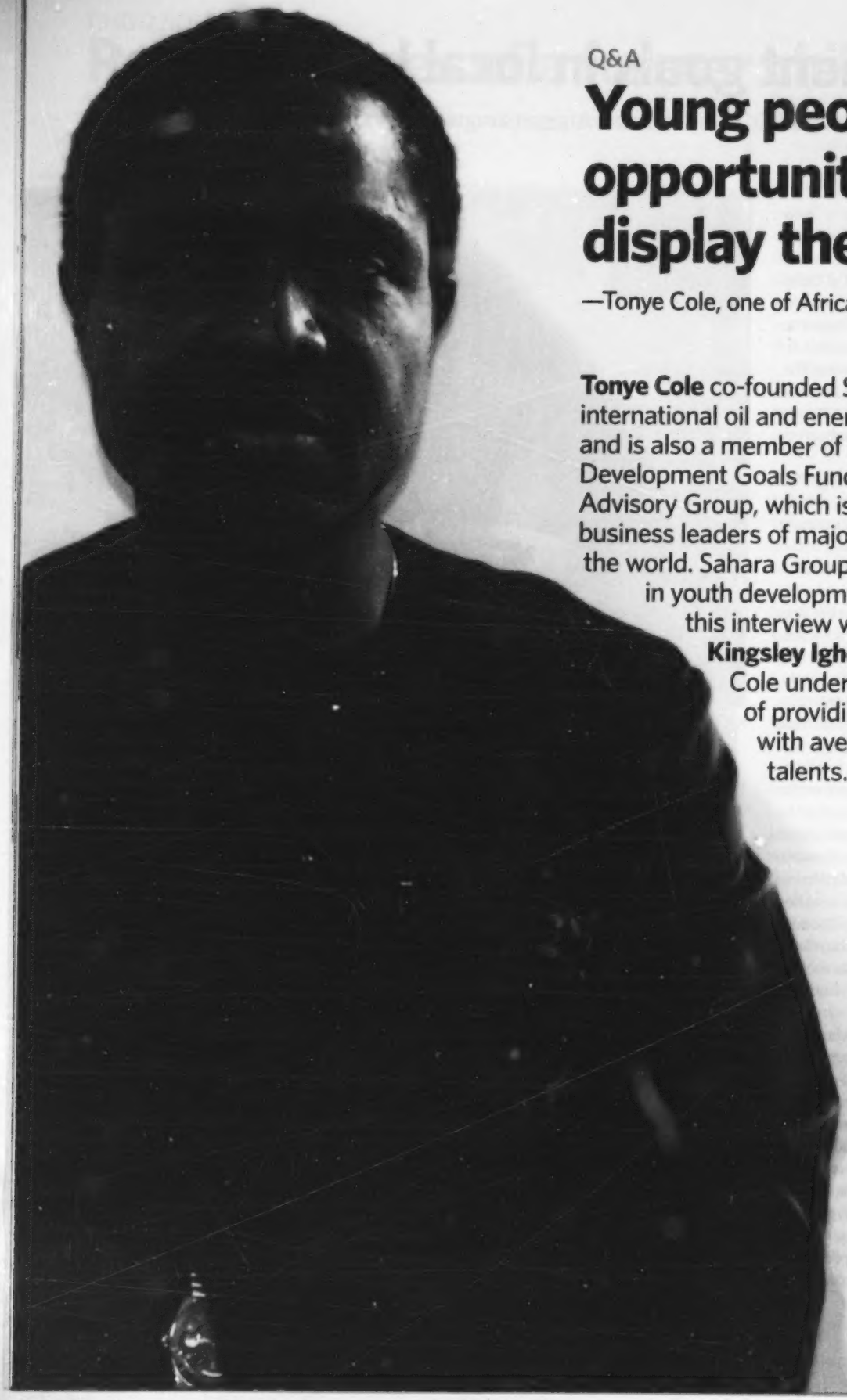


Q&A

Young people need opportunities to display their talents

—Tonye Cole, one of Africa's top business leaders

Tonye Cole co-founded Sahara Group, an international oil and energy conglomerate, and is also a member of the global Sustainable Development Goals Fund's Private Sector Advisory Group, which is made up of top business leaders of major companies around the world. Sahara Group has been involved in youth development in Nigeria. In this interview with *Africa Renewal's* **Kingsley Ighobor** in New York, Mr. Cole underscores the urgency of providing young people with avenues to express their talents.

Africa Renewal: Your company is said to be supporting young people in your country, Nigeria. How do you do this?

Mr. Cole: First, let me point out what we believe the youths have—ideas. However, there must be a match between their ideas and access to innovations. Young people need a platform that allows them to express their talents for the global market out there.

What do you mean by a "platform"?

Policies that allow young people to demonstrate their talents and a supportive environment that tells them all the time that they can do it, that there is this market. A pipeline they can use to access that market.

And what is this platform?

Once the government sets policies that allow you to take an idea, channel it through some territory and through that territory that idea hits this huge market, it's done. The revenue flows back to the young person somewhere in Africa.

Young people need not come to the West to demonstrate their talents. And that's exciting, because we get to keep our young people on the continent. But we need to give them the tools to export what they have and earn the foreign exchange that they can reinvest in their countries. That is our challenge. So we are creating an entrepreneurship platform that connects them to the rest of the world.

So your task is to advocate for policies that promote young entrepreneurs and support them in finding markets overseas, correct?

That's what platforms are.

What skill sets are you targeting?

We are designing a platform for young people who are IT minded. There are 12 million such young people in Nigeria and we want them to access the rest of the world. Once we can bring them onto this platform, connect them with the global market, from there they can achieve anything.

It means you are looking for young people who have skills in IT?

Not just IT. You can teach them other skills. Once you have a platform, one of the things we found out about the young people is that they are multi-talented. A lot of them are carrying phones through which they can make money, and some will do other things. Let's first of all create the environment that helps their ideas to fertilize.

What cooperation are you getting from policy makers?

That's where God has blessed us. At the end of the day, I've been doing business in Nigeria for 24 years, and during that time I have met a lot of people. Now, if we can be where we are today and we don't have the ability to influence, to speak, or to help governments make policies, then I think we would have failed a whole generation. So our responsibility is to be a bridge between the government and the young people, and have them talk to each other.

What do they want?

We understand the language the young people are speaking. They want a platform that allows them to access the rest of the world. We have access to the world and we have access to the government. So we support them.

Do you consider the lack of opportunities for young people by government or the private sector to be the reason why they join terrorist groups such as Boko Haram?

I think there is a saying that the devil finds work for idle hands. You must keep your young people engaged. If you have a huge population of young people and you do not challenge them, you're asking for big trouble. So it is imperative that we give them ways to legitimately develop their talents, whether it's through music, movies, agriculture, IT, whatever it is that they find, give them a way to express it.

> "We need policies that allow young people to demonstrate their talents and a supportive environment that tells them all the time that they can do it.

Youth can help achieve SDGs

—Samuel Malinga

In 2015, **Samuel Malinga**, at age 26, founded Sanitation Africa—a company engaged in turning human waste into briquettes for cooking and agricultural manure. For his innovative approach to waste management, Samuel has been recognized by several organizations, including the Tony Elumelu Foundation, a philanthropy that awarded him a grant to expand his operations. In 2014, Ventures Africa, a business and lifestyle publication, listed him as one of the 40 African innovators to watch. While visiting the United Nations headquarters in New York recently, Samuel shared his experiences with *Africa Renewal's* **Kingsley Ighobor**.

Africa Renewal: Why are you at the UN headquarters?

Malinga: I am here with 16 other young leaders from around the world to draft a one-year plan on how we can advocate for Sustainable Development Goals [SDGs] to ensure they are achieved by 2030.

Why were you selected for this trip?

I do sanitation projects. I do innovative toilet construction and upgrades. Our low-cost toilets address some of the challenges of climate change, such as soil collapse. Also, we have an innovative solution for emptying toilets, especially in the hard-to-reach areas due to poor infrastructure. It allows people to reuse their toilets in areas that don't have much space, instead of digging new pits.

You said they are "low-cost". How much does this cost?

For emptying a toilet, a client pays roughly $50. It costs between $200 and $400 to construct a new toilet. So it's cheaper to empty old ones (when the pit gets full after several months of use, depending on the number of users) than to construct new toilets.

Describe briefly your innovative solution.

We are converting human waste into briquettes for cooking and manure. Our research has shown that our briquettes burn longer

and are four times cheaper than firewood. We developed a pump to empty pits and then a treatment plant that turns the dried fecal sludge into briquettes that are used for cooking.

How many communities in Uganda are you operating in?

We are operating in three regions—greater Kampala, and in parts of eastern and western Uganda. We intend to spread this technology throughout Africa.

How many people do you employ?

There are six permanent employees at the moment, but we hire young people on a part-time basis to do marketing. Depending on tasks, we hire more people for toilet construction, sometimes between 10 and 20.

Without your efforts, how would communities now served by your company cope?

I think there would be a big problem, because people easily dump their waste into draining channels, which end up in our water reservoirs and supply systems. There would be a lot of contamination.

Who is financing your operations?

I must say, proudly, that the first money I got was from the Future Project in Lagos, Nigeria, spearheaded by the Tony Elumelu Foundation. They gave me around two million naira ($11,000 in 2014), with which I set up my company's structures. We could be making a bigger impact, but the funding is limited. Banks are hesitant to provide loans because of a lack of collateral.

But it's a profitable business?

Yes.

Which means in the future you could survive on your own?

Yes, that is the ultimate goal. A 25% profit margin could make our operations sustainable. It is not sustainable if we are soliciting funding like what other NGOs do.

How do you see your work within the global efforts to achieve SDGs?

We are going to do a lot of community mobilization because in order to achieve the SDGs, we need to make sure everybody is involved, particularly the youth. Governments need to know the importance of youth in development.

How would you describe the socioeconomic conditions of young Ugandans?

Most young Ugandans, especially those who have formal education, expect to get jobs after school. But these jobs are not readily available. And this is why many are now advocating for their rights: they want to be involved in decision making, in policy, and even in the process of preparing budgets.

What other challenges do young people face in Uganda?

Young people need mentors. They lack financing to start businesses. They are not properly represented politically.

Can you tell us who or what inspired you?

The community in which I grew up inspired me. At the age of 12, I saw people suffering from sanitation-related diseases like cholera, diarrhoea and dysentery. So I went ahead to study engineering. Upon graduation, I started thinking of how we can come up with solutions.

How do you see your business in the next 5 to 10 years?

We want to reach fast-growing towns in Uganda, expand our operations, employ more young people, and also reach other parts of East Africa.

How do you assess current youth policies in Uganda?

There are no clear policies on the youth at the moment and it's one of the things that I hope we can advocate for.

Development goals in local ...

From page 31

Cameroonian schools. His work in that campaign brought him to the attention of various UN agencies. Later he took part in the Voices of Youth project run by UNICEF.

He also supports the work of the UN Commission for Sustainable Development, raising awareness of the Earth Summit among other environmental action bodies as well as engaging young people in ways to address problems caused by climate change.

The Cameroonian activist belongs to many international youth advocacy groups, including Connect4climate, an organization that advocates for SDG 13, which calls for urgent action to combat climate change and mitigate its impact. He is also a member of the policy and strategy group of "The World We Want 2030," a UN youth forum that raises awareness of the SDGs.

Mr. Divine, who holds a degree in environmental chemistry and grants management from the University of Buea, Cameroon, was a former co-chair for the Climate Development African Youth Platform, which mobilises young people on climate change issues. In this role, he moderated discussions on community climate-smart agricultural activities. He is also a global youth digital advocate for the SDGs.

Translating the SDGs into indigenous African languages appears both enterprising and ambitious. Despite current funding challenges, Mr. Divine maintains that "there is no other way for the majority of Africans to be rallied in support of the SDGs...I have had to use mostly my own little resources to organize trainings and public communication campaigns. The young people who have bought my idea have volunteered to assist with translation in the various countries. But more needs to be done."

Mr. Divine intends to continue to organize training for young people in various countries and hopes to enlist the support of the UN and other organizations working to raise awareness of the SDGs. While translation has been going apace, ensuring that the translated texts elicit the desired engagement by the target audience is the bigger quest.

Linking smallholder farmers to banks

—Rita Kimani

Rita Kimani, 25, is one of the young leaders designated by the United Nations to help promote the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) among fellow youth. Through her initiative, FarmDrive, Rita is using data analytics and mobile phone technology to connect smallholder farmers with lending institutions in rural Kenya. She spoke to *Africa Renewal's* **Zipporah Musau** about her project.

Africa Renewal: Why were you selected to attend this event at the UN?

Kimani: I am here as one of the young leaders advocating for the Sustainable Development Goals. It's really the work I do. I co-founded a company called FarmDrive that helps local farmers in Kenya obtain credit. So, I am here to help bring the youth's voice in designing programmes for engaging the youth, specifically in the agricultural sector.

You said you founded FarmDrive. What really is it?

FarmDrive is a data analytics company developing alternative credit scoring models to benefit smallholder farmers. We've developed a mobile phone app which rural farmers can use to track their revenues and expenses, as well as apply for loans. We combine the farm-level data we get from the farmers with big datasets – like weather, climate, economic, and satellite data – to generate a credit score which financial institutions then use to lend to the farmers.

What made you venture into this technology?

I grew up in a farming community in Turbo, about three hundred km northwest of the capital, Nairobi, where most families grow maize. When I started university, I met my co-founder Peris Bosire on our first day on campus. We both studied computer science, but connected more because of our similar backgrounds growing up in farming communities. We brainstormed about how we could use technology to solve some of the farmers' problems we saw or experienced first-hand. That's how we ended up founding FarmDrive during our last year of university in 2014.

Who gives the farmers the credit?

We work with various financial institutions that give credit to small-scale farmers in Kenya. For the farmers who sign up with us, the loan application process is quite simple. They complete a short survey on the app, we analyze the complexities along with external data, and come up with a credit score for each farmer. We then give the information to various financial institutions to enable them to make informed lending decisions. We also make recommendations on how much credit we think a farmer could afford, and propose terms of payment. So in short, we're helping financial institutions assess risk and create good products so that they can better lend to smallholder farmers.

What numbers are you working with?

We have registered 3,000 farmers so far. Out of this, about 400 have accessed credit through us since December 2015. We have clients in 16 counties in Kenya out of the total 47. The majority of them are in horticulture, poultry, dairy or maize farming. Our goal is to reach 100,000 farmers.

What makes FarmDrive a unique product?

You know that farmers in Kenya, and Africa at large, do not have quite a footprint in the financial sector. They are either underbanked or unbanked. We call them "thin file." If you try to get any information about them in the formal financial sector, you will not get much, considering the methods that financial institutions use to give credit—such as requiring a credit history or bank statement, and many times collateral. But that does not mean farmers who lack these are bad borrowers. We asked ourselves, how else can financial institutions be able to profile these farmers, understand the risks and offer products that work? That is why we built this technology, to collect data on smallholder farmers and connect them to these institutions.

Where do SDGs come in?

The one thing that resonates with me for anyone pushing for the SDGs is that they talk of leaving no one behind. That is what I connect with most. But what does "leave no one behind" mean? I understand it to mean that everyone in the village will no longer go hungry or be poor. It's a huge undertaking.

Are you a farmer yourself?

Yes, although I don't own any piece of land, I have leased a greenhouse where I grow tomatoes and sweet peppers.

How do you see yourself in the next 10 years?

I'm passionate about getting involved in building programmes that actually work for farmers in Africa, specifically the young ones. Our vision as FarmDrive is to help farmers across Africa to achieve self-sustainability by accessing resources, not only to fend for themselves and their families, but also to thrive.

How do you connect the youth and agriculture?

I want to see more young people engaged in agriculture, because that's where the opportunities are. Agriculture presents an opportunity for Africa to get out of poverty and achieve many of the 17 SDGs. We urge governments and other organizations to involve the youth by building programmes that support them.

Why is agriculture not attractive to young people?

When I listen to the youth, they are very clear that they do not want to be the ones doing the manual work like tilling the land. They do not think it is sexy, and you cannot blame them. If you grew up in a farming community, you struggled to make ends meet, yet you spent all your time on the farm after school. Even parents themselves do not wish farming on their children upon graduation. But interestingly, with technology, things are changing. Youth farmers are now digitally managing their farms from afar, connecting with other farmers on social media to get advice, and getting market prices on their phone. The technologies available to farmers are changing and we want to help youth farmers be aware of and access these technologies.

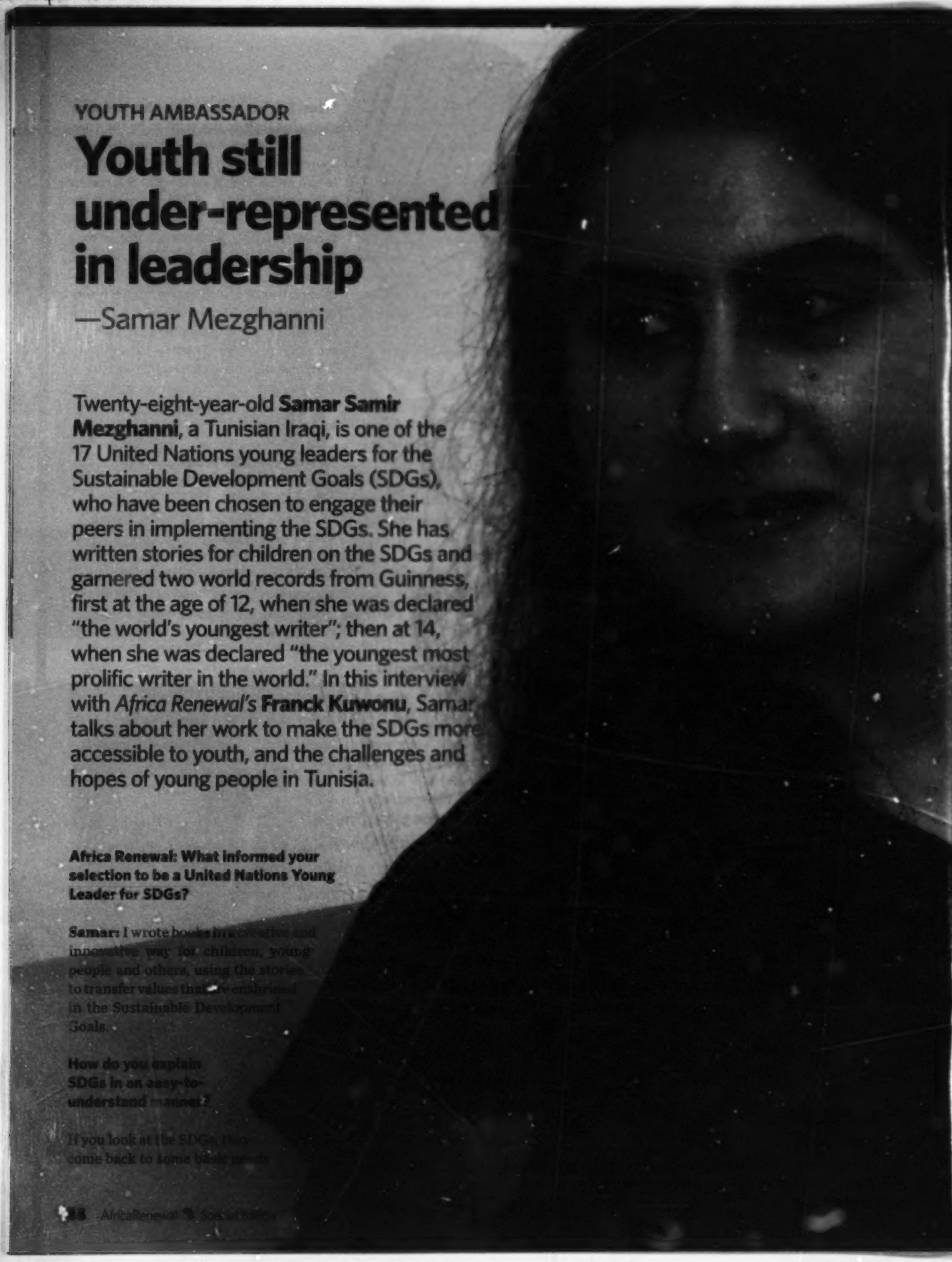
How do you think young people can be supported to become more productive citizens?

One of the key things is to make sure that we are not just "supporting" the youth but rather we are "working with them," making sure they are part of the conversation, being involved in designing programmes and policies that affect them, and listening to their voices.

YOUTH AMBASSADOR

Youth still under-represented in leadership

—Samar Mezghanni



Twenty-eight-year-old **Samar Samir Mezghanni**, a Tunisian Iraqi, is one of the 17 United Nations young leaders for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), who have been chosen to engage their peers in implementing the SDGs. She has written stories for children on the SDGs and garnered two world records from Guinness, first at the age of 12, when she was declared "the world's youngest writer"; then at 14, when she was declared "the youngest most prolific writer in the world." In this interview with *Africa Renewal's* **Franck Kuwonu**, Samar talks about her work to make the SDGs more accessible to youth, and the challenges and hopes of young people in Tunisia.

Africa Renewal: What informed your selection to be a United Nations Young Leader for SDGs?

Samar: I wrote books in a creative and innovative way for children, young people and others, using the stories to transfer values that are enshrined in the Sustainable Development Goals.

How do you explain SDGs in an easy-to-understand manner?

If you look at the SDGs, they come back to some basic needs

that can be expressed in very organic and simple language. For example, one of my last stories is about a mother representing the planet Earth to her children, who end up fighting over it. These children could be world's nations, or they could be people. I was depicting the different inequalities that exist in the world today and how we can overcome them. During my speech at last year's UN Youth Forum held here in New York, where I was invited as a keynote speaker, I used one of my stories to articulate these ideas in a language that is more accessible to children and other young people.

How so?

Basically, it is really about looking at the goals not as an agenda that is institutional but global. Not as a thing that is owned by the UN, but by people all over the world. Not as an action plan for bureaucrats, but one for human beings today. So if you look at it from that perspective, it's very easy to put stories for children that englobe those SDGs.

What is the situation of youths in your country today? What are their hopes and challenges?

We are facing the same problems young people from other parts of the world are facing: unemployment, underrepresentation and lack of education. However, for Tunisia specifically, five years after challenging an oppressive regime, I think young people are still struggling with subtle forms of repression and oppression that prevent them from becoming leaders, obviously in politics, but also in other areas in society. I feel that the revolution that gave space in the streets for young people has not yet opened up space in influential leadership positions for young people to occupy. I guess this is the biggest challenge facing young people in Tunisia.

Is there any hope that those challenges will be met anytime soon?

If soon means one year, I don't think these issues can be solved soon. If soon is 14 years, which is what is left for the SDGs to be implemented, it will depend on how we act on these issues instead of just talking about them. So I think there is hope in Tunisia.

So is there anything the youth themselves believe they can do to change things, or are they just waiting for things to change?

In Tunisia, if there is anyone believing in change and making change, it is young people. We just don't hear from them, because at the UN General Assembly you only hear about the successes and achievements of governments. But actually, when the government passes a law to fight corruption or make the country more democratic, it's not doing it because it's offering it to the citizens, it's doing it because the citizens have challenged the government and have pressured it to pass that law. Considering that young people are one of the biggest populations in the country, it is actually them who have been fighting corruption, advocating and putting government representatives and the leadership in a very uncomfortable position, making them take action.

The pace of change will depend on the youth and how deeply they are involved in political processes. Don't you think so?

Yes, absolutely. But then again, it's a two-way thing. The involvement of youth depends on the enabling environment they are offered, and also on whether their involvement would not put them at a risk of being persecuted.

If a young Tunisian wanted to see one or two things happen to quicken the pace of change, what would they be?

I think if there is one thing that needs to happen in my country, and actually in the whole Arab region, to quicken change is to gain the trust of the people. Up until now, our leaders still have not gained enough trust and confidence from the people, and especially from the young people, in order for their action to be meaningful. They are still being questioned, and rightfully so, by young people. As I said, the youth population in Tunisia is quite big, but there are no young leaders in politics or leading political movements. Young people are still not being represented in the most transparent, democratic and representative way. That must change.

Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg (in grey T-shirt) meeting with entrepreneurs and developers in Nairobi, Kenya. Facebook/Mark Zuckerberg

Facebook CEO looks for more 'likes' from

Mark Zuckerberg's trip to Kenya and Nigeria inspired local techies amid scepticism

BY **ELENI MOURDOUKOUTAS**

Facebook's exponential growth in Africa is attracting international attention. Last September Facebook's founder and chief executive officer, Mark Zuckerberg, visited Kenya and Nigeria, two countries that are among the top five Facebook users on the continent.

Given that 16 million Nigerians and 5.5 million Kenyans are active users on Facebook as of June 2016, according to the Internet World Statistics website, it is no shock that Mr. Zuckerberg would make extraordinary efforts to visit the hotbeds of technological innovation in Africa, where young tech entrepreneurs draw inspiration from the social media mogul's success.

During his surprise first trip to sub-Saharan Africa, he met with "Afropreneurs"—bright young African entrepreneurs bursting with innovative ideas and a passion for change, who are quickly gaining popularity for using creative means to solve Africa's problems. Many of these Afropreneurs took his visit as proof that they were making an impact on a global scale. Mr. Zuckerberg visited some of the most notable tech centres in Nigeria and Kenya.

Inspired by the ground-breaking success of Kenya's M-Pesa—the mobile money system that allows users to store money on an account on their phones and make payments via secure text messages—Mr. Zuckerberg visited iHub, a Nairobi-based innovation hub for the technology community where entrepreneurs can build and test their ideas.

At the iHub he met with two engineers who had developed a mobile payment system called PayGo Energy that is used for buying cooking gas. According to the Facebook owner, the engineers, Fausto Marcigot and Mark O'Keefe, are an inspiration to the rest of the world in thinking about how mobile money can be used to build businesses and help communities.

Boosting Afropreneurs

In Lagos, Mr. Zuckerberg sat down with developers at Andela, a start-up that trains software developers and offers them full-time placement with international companies, to discuss the obstacles faced by African software designers and how to connect the young tech developers to companies around the world. Andela received a $24 million donation from the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative (CZI) in June 2016.

Africa

Zuckerberg with a Nigerian enterpreneur at the Facebook Express Wi-Fi stand she runs in Lagos, Nigeria. Facebook/Mark Zuckerberg

software to sell Internet data, earning 15% in commissions.

"Mark's visit was a much-needed external validation of the sweat and immense efforts, mostly unsung, of the young Nigerians who have kept at it," Idris Ayodeji Bello, a Nigerian self-proclaimed Afropreneur, told CNN.

"We live in a world where talent is evenly distributed, but opportunity is not. Andela's mission is to close that gap," Mr. Zuckerberg said in Lagos.

Since it was founded two years ago, Andela has trained more than two hundred engineers selected from a pool of 40,000 applicants. The start-up has pledged to train 100,000 more engineers over the next 10 years, chief executive Jeremy Johnson told *Entrepreneur*, an America-based business magazine.

In an effort to further engage African entrepreneurs, Facebook created Express Wi-Fi to deliver quality, affordable Wi-Fi to underserved communities while empowering African entrepreneurs. Through Express Wi-Fi, African entrepreneurs will be provided with equipment and

However, not everyone was excited by Mr. Zuckerberg's Africa tour. Some believe he visited to assess his Facebook empire in Africa and promote his business interests, especially since the number of subscribers on the continent increased by a whopping 732.8% between 2010 and 2016, more than any other region during that period.

About 65% of Nigerians who responded to a 2015 survey by GeoPoll, a mobile survey platform, agreed that "Facebook is the Internet."

Also, many pointed to Mr. Zuckerberg's meeting with the Kenyan Cabinet Secretary for Information and Communications, Joseph Mucheru, as evidence of his intention to gain favour for his business venture.

Mariéme Jamme, a Senegalese tech entrepreneur and co-founder of Africa Gathering, a global platform for entrepreneurs to share ideas about development in Africa, wrote on Twitter, "[Mark Zuckerberg] knows [Africa] is all about numbers and access! Please, let's keep our head high, seek collaboration not validation."

Critics have also attacked the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative's Free Basics, a platform designed to provide free Internet access on mobile phones to underprivileged communities, arguing that the initiative offers free access only to a select group of websites. They maintain that it violates the core tenet of net neutrality—that Internet service providers should enable equal access to content and applications without favouring or blocking websites—in the 23 African countries where it was introduced, including Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Mauritania, Nigeria and South Africa.

Moreover, if access to free Internet is restricted to some websites, critics argue, it may put Facebook in the position of acting as a global gatekeeper, where participating websites must comply with certain "technical specifications" outlined by Facebook, such as for image sizes, applets and font formatting.

Evelyn Namara, a Ugandan techie specializing in youth and entrepreneurship at the African Civil Society for the Information Society (ACSIS), tweeted: "I'm quite frankly not over the moon about his visit because I know of his #freebasics agenda which topples innovation."

Other critics took offense at Mr. Zuckerberg's flowery talk of the entrepreneurial spirit in Kenya and Nigeria, with the prominent young Kenyan journalist Larry Madowo calling the sentiments "painfully patronizing."

The social media mogul did little to address financing, which entrepreneurs consider their principal challenge. According to the International Finance Corporation (IFC), a member of the World Bank Group, up to 8 in 10 small and medium-size enterprises (SMEs) in Africa lack sufficient funding.

While the jury is still out as to Mr. Zuckerberg's motives for his Africa tour and the impact of his visit, there is no doubt that he successfully captured the Afropreneurial spirit. "[Africa] is where the future is going to be built," he said firmly.

Public procurement opens doors for youth-led firms

Using government tenders to empower young people

BY DOYEUN KIM

Finding jobs for young people in the formal economy is a pressing challenge in Africa, countries where youth make up the largest share of the population but are largely without work.

Most of the jobs on offer are low-wage opportunities. According to "Empowered Youth, Sustainable Future," a 2014 report by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), more than 40% of youthful workers in sub-Saharan Africa are unpaid.

Unable to find work in the formal sector, young people find jobs largely in informal economies, particularly in agriculture and household enterprises where they tend to be underpaid. While the informal sector is critical to their survival, it does not offer enough opportunities that could lead to full participation in national economies.

Public procurement, whereby government and other public agencies procure goods, services and construction from private companies, can be a boon to job creation and the economic empowerment of youth. The World Bank estimates that the global public procurement market is worth a whopping $9.5 billion.

With this in mind, governments and public institutions are increasingly purchasing goods, works and services from youth-owned or youth-led enterprises, thereby expanding youth employment and empowerment.

Some governments have reserve targets of government contracts for businesses run by youth. For example, the government of Kenya has reserved 30% of all government tenders for youth, women and persons with disabilities, through the public procurement law passed in 2015. It has launched an online platform, the Access to Government Procurement Opportunities (AGPO) to register and pre-qualify companies owned by youth, women or persons with disabilities.

In South Africa, the Gauteng provincial government launched an initiative in 2013 designed to increase procurement spending on youth-owned companies, setting a target of 10% of all procurement contracts to be allocated to youth-owned enterprises.

Similarly, the province actively seeks goods and services from a government database of youth-owned enterprises. Procurement officers check required specifications against the database, says Sifiso Ndaba, the deputy director for youth development in the office of the premier of the Gauteng provincial government.

"As we allocate business or buy services, we actively make sure that the youth are prioritized and mainstreamed in procurement activities," says Mr. Ndaba.

A multi-dimensional challenge

Increasing procurement from youth requires facilitating access to finance, information and other resources that are often lacking for youth and women who are traditionally marginalized from formal markets.

"One of the hurdles that remain in all actors in this race is capacity," Zeinab Hussein, Kenya's principal secretary in charge of gender affairs, told a panel hosted by the UN Development Business (UNDB) in New York last year.

Ms. Hussein stressed the need for training and mindset shifts, not only among women and youth, but also among government officials, in business management. This entails strengthening the skills of young entrepreneurs through training and mentorship as well as providing financial support.

In South Africa, for instance, capacity building is managed through a local government agency called Gauteng Enterprise Propeller (GEP), which supports young entrepreneurs entering the public procurement market and general enterprise management. As young people would be at a disadvantage when matched against companies with more experience in bidding for large government contracts, GEP provides financial and non-financial support to help make their bids more competitive.

"We have learned that most small businesses collapse within three years," said Mr. Ndaba, in an interview with UNDB. He explained the rationale behind GEP's mentorship programme: "If you manage to break this [three-year] period, you are most likely to succeed."

By creating business-friendly environments for under-represented groups and providing access to resources that enable young people to participate successfully in markets, governments can make public procurement more inclusive. There is no doubt public procurement can be a crucial factor in empowering the youth of Africa.

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Knowledge economy appeals ...

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half you can have access to internet each month," says Adeloye Olanrewaju, a Nigerian entrepreneur who co-founded SaferMom, which gives expecting mothers access to health and pregnancy information via cell phones. "internet penetration is going to increase, more people are going to come online, and sectors like ours are going to get more attention," he predicts.

By "attention" he means investment in educational and job opportunities. "Nigerian youth are brilliant. We need to get them jobs," says Olanrewaju. "Lagos wants to be the Silicon Valley of Africa, but we see lots of youth struggling to gain the skills and experience to find employment."

Part of what's holding them back, he says, is a deep generational gap.

"Technology is still new in Africa," Olanrewaju told *Africa Renewal*. "People in power often are in the range of 50 years old. Technology is new to them." He says African governments have been slow to incorporate any of the promising tech achievements conceived by private sector start-ups or the established firms those start-ups are good at attracting. More than two years after the Kenyan government announced that it would require its public minibuses, or *matatus*, to use cashless payment services in an effort to reduce bribery between operators and traffic police, *matatu* owners continue to resist those efforts.

But Olanrewaju isn't surprised by the slow rate at which some African governments are adapting. "Innovation isn't usually led by the government—it's led by people like you and me."

Olanrewaju would know. As project director for Nigeria's Youth LEAD initiative, he oversaw the training of 400 students in different technology skill sets and mentored 25 of them in social entrepreneurship with the goal of helping them begin their own companies. He says the private sector has been essential in generating opportunities for youth in ICT.

"We have more than 20 incubators in Africa," says Olanrewaju. "That means that if I have an idea, instead of paying thousands of dollars in rent in Lagos every month, I can pay a few hundred dollars and have access to the internet, space and mentors and all that. I can do a lean start-up."

Still, he says, Nigeria's technology sector is no panacea for Africa's unemployed youth. "Not everybody is going to build a viable business. If you actually have the right network, the right mentorship, and you have access to funds, there's no reason not to try. On the other hand, if you don't really have enough experience managing a company, why not get a job, learn some innovative roles, and learn how that works before starting your own business?" He explains that not every African needs to be an entrepreneur: "Different people, different strokes."

When the private sector isn't enough

African governments should do more if they hope to grow a knowledge economy to absorb the continent's young workforce.

"We have a lot of talent in Africa," says Esther Muchiri, a Kenyan consultant and a recent vice-chair of Kenya IT and Outsourcing Service (KITOS), a trade association of IT and IT-enabled companies.

Much of Africa's progress in generating job opportunities for young people interested in technology is coming from the private sector—entities like Africa's 300 tech hubs and business incubators, including iHub in Nairobi, CTIC Dakar in Senegal and the Bandwidth Barn in Cape Town "all of which nurture young talent and innovative ideas," says Muchiri.

She adds, "What is clogging the tech scene in Africa is the gap between innovations and market needs." Muchiri says that too often, developers make assumptions about what consumers want or need, only to discover later that their idea isn't exactly what the local market is looking for.

One way African countries are bridging that gap is through partnerships with leading global educational institutions. Many foreign universities already operate satellite campuses in Africa. A partnership between Rwanda and Carnegie Mellon University, a top US engineering school, is enrolling hundreds of young Rwandans in programmes leading to Master of Science degrees in information technology. Rwanda's government is covering half of each tech students tuition, easing the financial burden of a tech education.

Rwanda is also home to one of Africa's largest technology universities, the University of Rwanda's College of Science and Technology, which hopes to enroll 9,000 students by 2020. As African governments continue to invest in internet access and technology education, the potential for young Africans to find jobs in the continent's IT sector is sure to grow.

Youth discontented with ...

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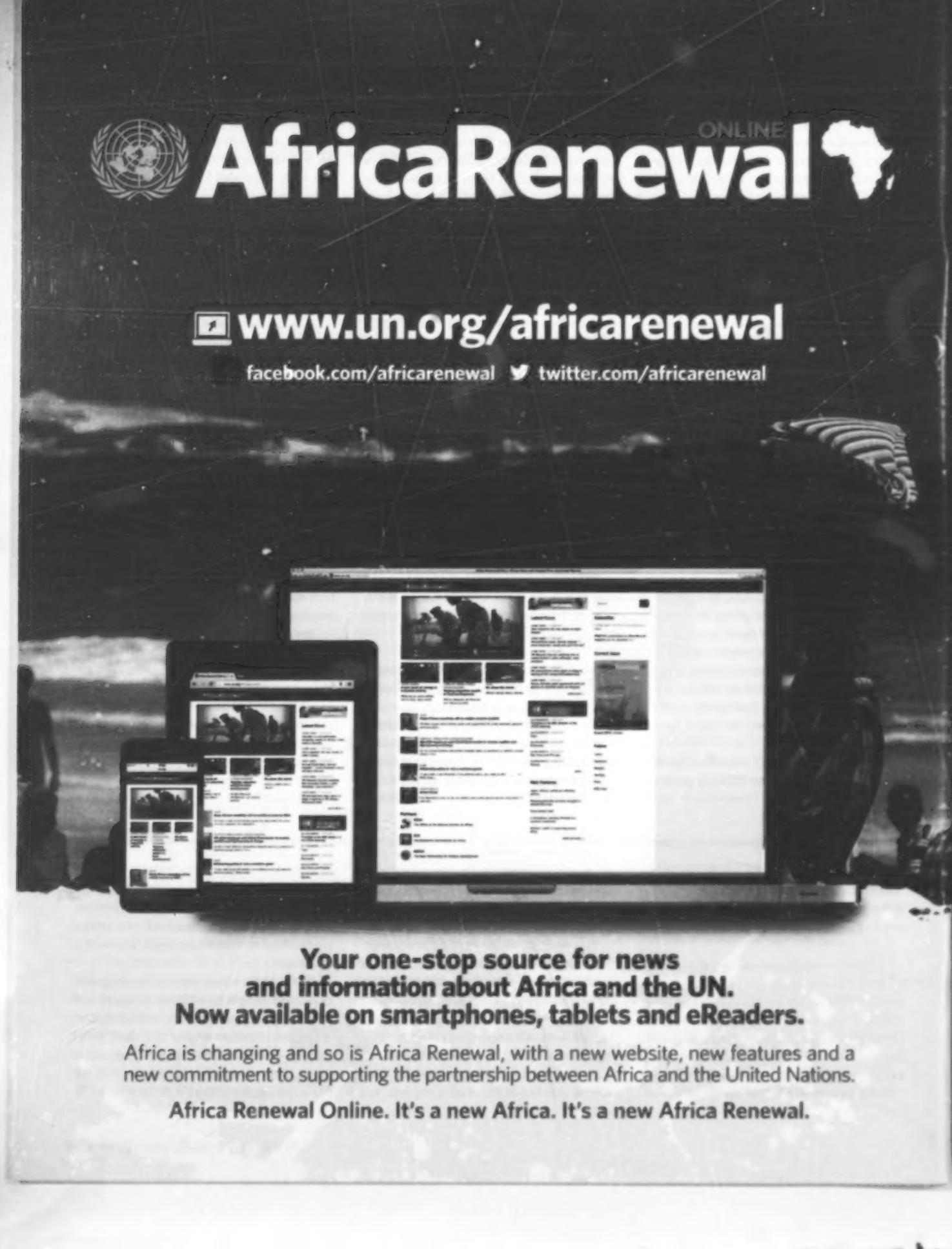
Digital activism as an alternative mode of political participation has increased youth participation in civic affairs and "low politics," according to the Global Youth Development Index and Report 2016. By *low politics* the report meant social and environmental issues, mostly at local levels. "Young people are using social media to express their opinion, participate in campaigns and organize protests," said the report.

However, for all the momentum created by the Arab Spring and the successes of youth involvement in electing new leaders in Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Chad, Gabon, Niger and Senegal, it appears this has had little impact in raising political engagement among the youth in Africa.

According to Professor Bratton, this may be attributed to "media reports and the extensive use of social media platforms by young people," which may have contributed to presenting a distorted view of the real influence wielded by youth across the continent.

Yet even as youth remain less engaged than older people in all other categories of political participation, with the exception of demonstrations and protests, the Tanzanian experience showed that they may have found their voice on social media, and are participating in politics in a different way.



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